OXFORD

DEAD RECKONING

Memories of the 1971 Bangladesh War

SARMILA BOSE

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Services Book Club
GHQ, Rawalpindi

Dadua and Dida
Charu Chandra Chowdhuri and Chhaya Devi Chowdhurani
for everything

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While studying the application of statistics in public policy at Harvard, I learned that the real challenge was to apply the neat models of theory in the real world of imperfect, incomplete or unreliable information. When decisions had to be made, it was not possible to cop out of doing the analysis and arriving at a recommendation just because the data were not perfect, for they were never going to be perfect.

Flying helicopters in the dark during the war, pilots used 'dead reckoning', when one's best judgment was that by going in a particular direction for a certain time in a certain way one was likely to arrive at the intended destination, or at least as close as possible to it. Not flying was not an option. Navigating through the conflicting memories of 1971 seemed a very similar journey. There is only partial visibility and many treacherous twists and turns, with plenty of room for error. Yet, by steering a firm course charted by an open mind, research based on evidence and corroboration, fairness to all sides and analysis anchored on data that you actually have rather than what you would have liked to have, one is likely to arrive, *inshallah*, at the best approximation of the ideal destination.

I am grateful to everyone who helped me, but they are not responsible for the content of this book. I am.

INTRODUCTION

MEMORIES IN CONFLICT

'But is there anyone who is really good? Maybe goodness is just make-believe. Man just wants to forget the bad stuff and believe in the made-up good stuff. It's easier that way'.

– Villager in Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon*

It was evening in Calcutta in the year 1971. I was walking with my mother from our home at 1 Woodburn Park to Netaji Bhawan, the museum and institute located in the older ancestral house, round the corner on Elgin Road. This was unusual, but then, unusual events were afoot. Some kind of dreadful fighting had broken out in neighbouring East Pakistan and refugees were pouring into our side of Bengal. My father, a paediatrician by profession, had set up a 'field hospital' near the border. My older brother had gone to visit there, but I was not allowed to go. My mother was involved with other ladies in relief work for the refugees and I was accompanying her to one of these gatherings held on the ground floor of Netaji Bhawan.

We walked down the long driveway and out of the gate, and crossed Woodburn Road to turn left towards Elgin Road, and there I saw it on the pavement—the body, already stiff but clearly recognisable, of our pet cat which had gone missing. My mother finally led me away and we proceeded to Netaji Bhawan. I didn't register anything about the refugees that evening. All I remember is the kind face of Bina Das looking down towards me and saying in a gentle voice, '*Or prothom dukkho, na?*' (Her first sorrow, isn't it?)

Bina Das was a Bengali revolutionary. As a young woman she had shot at the British Governor of Bengal at a convocation ceremony in Calcutta University, and missed. She spent many years in jail. Shootings and revolutionaries

had now jumped out of the pages of history and reappeared on the streets of Calcutta. The new rebels were called 'Naxalites'[1] and they were my introduction to domestic politics in India.

If we were out early enough in the morning in those days, from the window of the car we might see a body on the road, uncleared debris from the previous night. I remember my mother trying to prevent me from seeing a corpse one day, while I, with a child's natural curiosity, craned my neck to look. One morning as we were driving along the Maidan there was a strange thud from the Ambassador car in front of us and the body of a man flew out and hit a tree-trunk on the left. Everyone in our car thought he had been thrown from the back of the Ambassador. The other car kept driving and so did we. When I started research on the 1971 conflict I asked several friends in Calcutta what they could remember about people being killed by the regime in East Pakistan. I was struck by the answer of one colleague who had been a college student at the time. He said that whatever he remembered about Bangladesh in 1971 was in retrospect, as at the time he had been too distracted by people being killed by the regime in West Bengal, on the Indian side of the border.

If Naxalites were my introduction to domestic politics, the Bangladesh war of 1971 was my introduction to international politics. The world outside the gates of 1 Woodburn Park seemed to be a disturbingly violent one. From what I could gather from fervent discussions among adults in Calcutta, a little more than two decades after the departure of the British, our Bengali brethren across the border were once again fighting for freedom. This time, their fellow countrymen from the other side of India—West Pakistanis—seemed for some inexplicable reason intent on killing them all. All the West Pakistanis seemed to be generals as well. The ruler was General Yahya Khan and a particularly bloodthirsty one called General Tikka Khan was in charge in East Bengal. President Nixon was backing Pakistan. India had the support of the Soviet Union. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi seemed to be taking on the world single-handed as India played white knight to the beleaguered Bangladeshis.

Strangely, the existence of East Pakistan had barely touched upon our childhood until then, even though my maternal family was originally from there. My grandparents spoke the East Bengali dialects of their respective regions, but they were long settled in Calcutta. But Bengali nationalism seemed to be sweeping Calcutta. We had a record of a speech given by the fiery leader of the Bangladeshis, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was played so many times that I had the entire speech by heart and can still remember parts of it. It was from Sheikh Mujib's speech that I learned the use of the term '*inshallah*'—'*Rakta jakhan*

diyechhi', he thundered, '*rakta aro debo. Edesher manushke mukto koira chharbo inshallah*'. (Since we have given our blood, we will give more blood. I will make the people of this land free, God willing.)[2] When my father went to Dhaka after the independence of Bangladesh and met Sheikh Mujib, the newly installed Prime Minister clasped him in his proverbial bear-hug and apparently wept with emotion.

The tales of the refugees were harrowing, their plight truly pitiful. Important visitors came to see them. One was the American Senator Edward Kennedy, his handsome face and shirt sleeves translucent amidst the sea of human misery. George Harrison sang in Bengali, '*O bhagaban khodatallah, moder chhaira kotha gela*' (O Lord God, where have you gone abandoning us). A Bengali singer sang '*Shono ekti Mujiborer theke lakkha Mujiborer kanthaswarer dhwani pratidhwani akashe batase othe roni—Bangladesh, amar Bangladesh!*' (Listen, from the voice of one Mujib a lakh of Mujib's voices speak and echo around the wind and sky—Bangladesh, my Bangladesh!)

Finally full-fledged war broke out between India and Pakistan. There had been a war between India and Pakistan just a few years before, when I was very small. At that time the people of East Pakistan were fighting against India.[3] All I recall about that war is sitting on the sofa in the drawing room of Woodburn Park with my family when a siren went off at night, while my uncles and cousins who lived on the upper floors came down to us on the ground floor. I remember being afraid, and not understanding why someone would want to drop a bomb on us. Another peculiar thing about war was that my father had to cut up reams of white cloth into strips, which he then glued on diagonally, like an X, on every single glass pane in the house. It took a very long time, especially the French windows to the verandah—three sets of which opened out from the drawing room alone. The other odd thing was the black paint on the top half of the headlights of all the cars.

This war was short-lived, however. India won, Bangladesh became free. There was euphoria all around. The Indian army was led by Sam Manekshaw, who exuded a dashing 'can-do'. But the man of the moment was the commander of the Eastern command, General Jagjit Singh Aurora, a smartly turbaned Sikh, framed for history as he sat with a large man in a beret called General A.A.K. Niazi, who signed the surrender documents on behalf of Pakistan. Sheikh Mujib, a prisoner in West Pakistan for nine months, returned to Dhaka to a hero's welcome.

Twenty years later I was recording a radio interview for the BBC in Bush House in London, where I was one of the presenters of a South Asia news pro-

gramme. My interviewee, in Delhi, was General Jagjit Singh Aurora. As we tried to get the sound right, I talked to General Aurora. I told him I was from Calcutta and remembered him as a war-hero. 'Thank you, my dear', said a kindly voice from the other end of a crackly line. For the most part, however, General Aurora was agitated. His interview was about the human rights violations against Sikhs in Indian Punjab and draconian laws like TADA.[4] I was sympathetic to the issue and the interview went smoothly. Later I heard that it had not gone as well with an Indian language programme and General Aurora had got upset. Here was the war-hero of 1971 pitted against the very state he had served, on the grounds of violation of the rights of his people. I thought I might write something about the irony.[5]

Another decade passed before that spark became a full-fledged research project on 1971. In the meantime I found that General Aurora's public status as a war-hero did not correspond to the view of some of his fellow officers. One wrote that 'his command did not take him seriously as a fighter because he did not display the flamboyance of a soldiers' general'.[6] Another sneered that he 'was not regarded in the Army as a commander of any distinction' and that 'he had failed to win the trust and confidence of most field commanders'.[7] A third, not content with a book's worth of disparaging remarks, even sniped at his wife.[8] General Aurora did not write his memoirs. By the time I met him face to face, it was no longer possible to discuss the details of 1971 with him.[9]

If this was the fate of the winning commander, I wondered what had become of the one who had lost. The result was a revelation. General A.A.K. Niazi turned out to have a distinguished past and a tragic fate. Honoured by the British with the Military Cross for his performance on the Burma front during the Second World War, he was a general who had literally fought his way up from the ranks and a humble background. In his book and his discussions with me he condemned the way in which General Tikka Khan had conducted the military action in Dhaka on 25 March 1971, but also criticised General Sahabzada Yaqub Khan, the previous Governor, for copping out at the eleventh hour of the crisis.[10] The Bengali insurgency was wiped out within a few weeks of Niazi's arrival in East Pakistan in April 1971. But in the continuing absence of any political settlement, his men ended up fighting a wearying war against Indian-assisted guerrillas for months and then a full-scale invasion by India from all directions, helped by a population largely hostile to the Pakistan army. By all accounts the Pakistan army performed astonishingly well against India in East Pakistan under almost impossible odds. Nevertheless, suffering the humiliation

of becoming the face of Pakistan's 'surrender', Niazi found himself vilified by his own people for losing to India.[11]

Much of the literature on 1971 is preoccupied with the conflict between India and Pakistan, with the Cold War as backdrop, marginalising the people of the land where it was fought. Indian accounts are predictably triumphal with regard to victory over Pakistan, with the memoirs of a few officers peppered with self-promotion and derogation of others. Most of the key players did not publish memoirs. Pakistani discussions on 1971 are full of bitter recriminations, mostly with regard to losing to India, with deafening silence from the majority of those who had served in East Pakistan. The Bangladeshi refrain, by contrast, plays volubly and melodramatically on the theme of Pakistani 'villains' and Bengali 'victims', often with scant regard for factual accuracy or analytical sophistication. The material from all parties to the conflict is relentlessly partisan, with the Bangladeshi ones infused with a deep sense of grievance that their suffering has not been given due acknowledgment in the world. Yet, in spite of the passage of three decades, Bangladeshis collectively failed to produce well-researched, documented and thoughtful histories of 1971 which might influence world opinion with any degree of credibility. The conflict of 1971, therefore, is in need of serious study in many aspects.

The only book on 1971 that stands out in terms of research, analysis and objectivity is by the American scholars Richard Sisson and Leo Rose: *War and Secession: Pakistan, India and the Creation of Bangladesh* (1991). Sisson and Rose did their research in the 1970s, interviewing key players in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and the United States. Most of the senior players have since passed away, making their work unique. On reading Sisson and Rose I was intrigued to find that the picture of what happened in 1971 that emerges from this work by two eminent scholars differed significantly from my childhood memories from Calcutta, which reflect the dominant narrative and public perception of 1971 in South Asia and beyond.

While Sisson and Rose's book addressed diplomatic and policy issues of 1971 at the macro level, my study addresses the other end of the spectrum—how the conflict played out among people at the ground level. Its focus is the civil war within the territory of East Pakistan—between those who wanted independence for Bangladesh and those who believed in preserving the unity of Pakistan—rather than the war between India and Pakistan, though India's heavy involvement on the pro-liberation side blurs that distinction to some extent. The study examines particular events or areas in-depth, using multiple

sources of information and including the testimony of all parties to build as complete a picture as possible. Its aim is to contextualise and humanise the war by examining specific instances in detail at the ground level, while gaining insights into the conflict as a whole.

I found myself rather uniquely positioned to do this pioneering work. As a Bengali I was able to receive help from Bangladeshis, visit sites in Bangladesh, interview Bangladeshi participants and eye-witnesses to events and read Bangladeshi sources in the vernacular. With the help of friends and colleagues in Pakistan I was able to obtain—after much hard work and perseverance—unprecedented access to Pakistani participants on the ground in East Pakistan, the vast majority of them officers of the Pakistan army, who were largely unheard from. This study for the first time brings together the experiences of all sides of the conflict at the ground level and combines them with other documentary or audio-visual material, to create a unique chronicling of the 1971 conflict that serves as the basis for non-partisan analysis. It sheds all preconceived notions and allows the material to tell its own stories. While I hope that it is the first of many systematic, dispassionate and evidence-based studies on 1971 and that there will be more by future scholars, in a crucial way my study is destined to remain unique just as Sisson and Rose's book was. This is because many of the people who directly experienced the 1971 war, whom I interviewed, were already elderly, and will pass away with time.

The case studies in this book are from different districts and different moments of the timeline of the conflict, and involve different groups of 'combatants', 'perpetrators' or 'victims'. They are therefore 'representative' of the conflict, though not 'comprehensive'. Only institutional projects on a national level could even attempt to be a 'comprehensive' study of 1971 in any meaningful way, and no such effort is in evidence. Bangladeshi institutional works, whether government or non-government, all suffer from multiple layers of partisanship and poor quality and blatant selectivity in 'documentation'.

The specific instances studied in-depth in this book were selected after discussion with several Bangladeshis with a keen interest in the war, almost all strongly 'pro-liberation', or else were suggested by research into published material from all sides. The timeline starts around January 1971, just after the historic elections of December 1970, and ends in March 1972, three months after the independence of Bangladesh. The events discussed took place in areas scattered across the territory of East Pakistan/Bangladesh, including Jessore, Khulna, Chittagong, Dhaka, Narsingdi, Mymensingh, Tangail, Rajshahi, Saidpur, Thakurgaon. There are instances from towns and villages, from the heart

of Dhaka to the borderlands with India which surrounds the territory of East Pakistan/Bangladesh on three sides.

The data was collected primarily during 2003–6 in Bangladesh and Pakistan from site visits, interviews with survivors, eye-witnesses and participants, published and unpublished eye-witness accounts and memoirs in English and Bengali, photos, films and foreign media reports of the time. During this period I visited Bangladesh and Pakistan many times. Some of the research was done in Britain and the USA.

I did most of the location work in Bangladesh first. There is a constituency of Bangladeshis who are devoted to the cause of their independence and to preserving the memories of the trauma that accompanied its achievement. There was no dearth of people who were eager to help, to recommend people to talk to or material to read, and to take me to the places where I wanted to go. They were so happy that I was taking an interest in the story of their country. I was overwhelmed by their warmth and hospitality, and the time people were willing to give me to talk about what were for them often very painful memories. It was hard enough just listening to the stories of trauma. Some survivors spoke with a strange composure, others were racked with grief. Sometimes, as when a woman broke down while describing how her husband and son had been shot in front of her in Chuknagar, one had to set aside the task to comfort the interviewee before resuming. All the while I had to remind myself to keep a cool head and not lose sight of the task at hand. Once I apologised to Mrs Shyamali Nasreen Chowdhury for asking yet another clarifying question about her husband's killing in the massacre of Bengali nationalist professionals and intellectuals in December 1971. She said she did not mind, she would speak about it as many times as necessary in the interest of justice.

Ironically, parts of the flood of 'assistance' actually posed problems. I had to gently separate the true eye-witnesses whose testimony I wanted to record from the numerous others who were all excitedly trying to tell me 'all about it' without having been present at the scene. I had to sift trivial or dubious material from the truly useful. Most of the Bangladeshi intelligentsia I met seemed to be unaccustomed to the notion of cross-checking for facts or search for independent corroboration. Many were imbued with hatred or bitterness towards their opponents. Even well-educated people often made no distinction between well-established events and the wildest rumours. Straight questions about a person or event often produced answers that had nothing to do with the question. As a general pattern, usually those who had truly suffered during 1971 were relatively more level-headed and reliable in their testimony. What

they had experienced was traumatic enough. Some accounts of participants seem driven by the need for self-promotion or to be seen to have been on the 'right' side after Bangladesh had achieved independence. The worst were the ones, often in Dhaka or abroad, who had not participated or suffered directly in the war, but had 'views' nevertheless, never mind the facts. The same turned out to be true about many people in Pakistan as well.

Soon an additional problem emerged in Bangladesh—all the people trying to help me were strongly 'pro-liberation' and were not on speaking terms with anyone from the 'pro-unity' camp within Bangladesh. Indeed, even within the 'liberation' side, civilians and military participants, and even some civilians with differing political views, seemed still to be fighting out 1971 among each other. Many did not seem to appreciate that I needed to speak to all sides of the conflict in a fair manner. When I spoke candidly of my plan to seek out Pakistani officers who had been in East Pakistan for their version of events, many members of the Bangladeshi intelligentsia reacted with blind hatred and vindictiveness.

Help was not as forthcoming when it came to trying to speak to those who had believed in united Pakistan, or those who had been at the receiving end of Bengali nationalist wrath. 'Why are you using the White Paper? It's all lies', said one Bangladeshi 'liberal' in Dhaka, referring to the Government of Pakistan document on alleged Bengali atrocities against non-Bengalis, which I was trying to double-check. Yet Bengalis in Khulna spoke openly about the killing of non-Bengali 'Biharis' there.[12] When I asked about the alleged massacre at Mymensingh cantonment the director of the Liberation War Museum told me there had been no cantonment in Mymensingh. Shortly thereafter a site visit confirmed the large-scale killing of West Pakistanis at the East Pakistan Rifles centre in Mymensingh, referred to locally as a 'cantonment', as reported in the White Paper. Yet Bangladeshi intellectuals seemed willing to believe even the most dubious and uncorroborated Bengali accounts with an unquestioning mind.

If the challenge in Bangladesh was to sift through the overwhelming amount of 'help', the challenge in Pakistan initially was to get anyone who had been in East Pakistan to talk to me at all. For my purpose I needed to talk to Pakistan Army officers who had served in East Pakistan in 1971, especially those who had been present at the events or in the areas I was looking at in-depth. Though I started with General Niazi, the Commander of the Eastern Command, I wanted to speak primarily to those who had been junior officers then, as they were the ones out in the field, carrying out the martial law duties,

counter-insurgency and war-fighting. Owing to the small number of West Pakistani officers and troops in East Pakistan facing extraordinary circumstances, many young officers were left to shoulder responsibilities, in terms of territory or decision-making, that they never would have had to bear in peacetime or conventional wars. These were the men I needed to talk to.

My ethnic, religious and national background—and gender as well—meant that officers of the Pakistan army could not exactly be expected to rush to open their hearts to me about their experiences in 1971. Every conceivable thing that could be 'wrong' with my profile from their perspective was 'wrong' with me, except my academic background. Indeed, General Niazi initially said 'no', and it took considerable effort on my part and that of good friends in Pakistan to persuade him and his family to speak to me. Once they met me, they looked upon my non-partisan approach in sheer disbelief, and the initial rejection turned into an acceptance that was no less emotional than among Bengalis.

The same would be true with many other officers. It took a long time and a lot of effort, but I made progress with my interviews, one officer at a time. I was assisted in these lengthy persuasions by Pakistani and American friends who located officers and recommended me to them. Some of the officers—astonished as ever by my neutrality—then helped locate others and recommended me to fellow-officers. Most officers I interviewed had at least one other officer to recommend, and some of them made efforts to find and persuade others way beyond my expectations. Eventually some three dozen army officers who had served in East Pakistan in 1971 talked to me about their experiences. For most of them I was the first researcher with whom they had spoken about 1971. They included two Bengali officers who had remained loyal to the Pakistan Army. Almost all the officers had retired and almost everyone spoke mostly on the record. A very small number spoke on condition that their names would not be published. Of the ones directly approached, a few still refused.

I was received with warmth and hospitality, plus incredulity, in this new circle too, just as I had been in Bangladesh. Just as complete strangers in Bangladesh would say '*bhaat khaiya jaan*' (an invitation to have 'rice'—a meal—at their home), I ended up with numerous offers of 'home away from home' from Karachi to Peshawar. And among these Pakistanis there was just as much belief in the rightness of their cause, and the unfairness of world opinion, as pain from the trauma of a fratricidal war and the ignominy of defeat and dismemberment of the country. However, there was also a touch of contrition, a greater degree of acknowledgment than in Bangladesh of mistakes made by

one's own side, and while there was a good deal of bitterness about their own leaders or the arch-enemy India, unlike the Bangladeshis they had little hatred towards their former countrymen.

Whether through oral interviews or the written word, the principal sources for this study are essentially memories, supplemented with other documentary or audio-visual material. Sometimes they corroborate each other, at other times they are irreconcilable in their contradictions. At yet other times they give varying, but equally valid, recounting of the same event. Even visual images are contested and controversial. Memories of those who were actually present are clearly superior as primary source material to the 'views' of those who were not, but memories have their own limitations. After the passage of such a long time, memories may not be entirely accurate. Also, there is no way to guarantee that a witness will not give false information, or conceal something. Yet there is no better source to study the ground realities. Sometimes testimony is clearly supported or contradicted by more reliable information, at other times something may seem dubious but cannot be disproved. The only way to deal with this problem is to use multiple sources, which is what I do in this study. Some single source information therefore could not be included in the book. 1971 is an infinite well of stories, many of which have to await future consideration.

Contrary to popular expectation, foreigners' accounts or press reports are not uniformly reliable sources. Media reports from the involved countries—Pakistan, India, Bangladesh—are best discounted entirely owing to wildly partisan positions and blatant propaganda at a time of war. But even foreign correspondents' reports need to be carefully scrutinised to separate eye-witness accounts from reports of what somebody else has told the reporter. As with interviews or memoirs, there is always some chance that an 'eye-witness' account may also be inaccurate or false, but there is nothing one can do about that risk other than bear it. Even the same news report may have reliable parts—based on what was witnessed by the reporter—and unreliable parts that are only 'hearsay'.

An interesting example is Anthony Mascarenhas' famous report in the *Sunday Times* published on 13 June 1971.[13] His eye-witness description from Comilla of how a Bengali, especially a Hindu, could have his life snuffed out at the whim of a single army officer serves as a powerful indictment of the military action, but his description of the army's attack on the Hindu area of Shankharipara in old Dhaka on 25–26 March—where he was not present—is given without citing any source and turns out to be entirely inaccurate accord-

ing to the information obtained from my interviews with survivors of Shankharipara.

Even useful press reports have been widely misused by the warring parties. While Mascarenhas' condemnation of military action is much publicised, few know that in the same article he also wrote about gruesome atrocities committed by Bengalis against non-Bengalis, with casualty figures in the same league as those allegedly committed by the army. Mascarenhas' report is actually far more even-handed than is commonly believed. Another example of the crude attempt at misusing press reports is the inclusion in the Bangladesh government's official compilation of 1971 documentation (14th volume) of Nicholas Tomalin's report in the *Sunday Times* of 11 April 1971, seen to be favourable to the Bengali nationalist position, and the exclusion of Tomalin's reports of 2 April and 4 April, which were eye-witness accounts of the massacre of non-Bengali civilians by Bengali nationalists in Jessore.[14] Numerous similar instances of manipulation have caused multiple distortions to the story of 1971.

While I was determined to be non-partisan in my approach, I had not expected any major change in the broad story-line of 1971 with which I had grown up. Because of the decades of inaccurate, incomplete, partisan and unreliable information, there was a need to chronicle what happened before one could do any meaningful analysis. I thought I would be filling in the glaring gaps, with accurate information on particular instances and fair representation of all sides, leading to better analysis and a greater understanding of the conflict through detailed human circumstances.

But as I put all the material together, the story that emerged surprised me. Some of the broad brush-strokes of the dominant narrative were still there—the widening gulf between East and West in Pakistan, the failure of a negotiated peace, the attempt by a military regime to impose a military solution to a political problem, a ferocious fratricidal war with awful human suffering, intervention by India on a grand scale to seize the opportunity to dismember its enemy. But in important ways the conflicting memories of those who were there told a story that diverged significantly from the popular narrative in India and Bangladesh, and to a large extent the world, given that the winning side's narrative was the dominant one. Sometimes the comparison of differences allowed me to make a judgment about what probably happened, with reasonable confidence. At other times the contradictions remain just that—irreconcilable differences. Either way, I have let the voices of those who were present unfold the story in the way that their experiences reveal.

In the absence of any institutional 'truth and reconciliation' effort, participants on all sides in the 1971 conflict remain bitterly divided, in denial to a significant degree, and without 'closure' in numerous instances. After I presented a paper at a conference at the United States State Department in the summer of 2005, the final version of which was published by the Indian academic journal *Economic and Political Weekly* in October 2005,[15] there were strong reactions among all the warring parties. It seemed that all sides had expected me to be partisan either towards themselves or towards their opponents, and were surprised to find that I was not, with curious and ironic results. In Pakistan, where it had initially been a challenge to get the key players to talk to me, the publication of my first paper helped open a few more doors; in Bangladesh, where so many had rushed excitedly to help in the beginning, the line went dead among the pro-liberationists who had been helping me. People identifying themselves as Pakistanis requested more information; many identifying themselves as Bangladeshis denounced me, often without reading my work; some 'patriotic' Indians condemned me for giving fair consideration to the Pakistanis, and a few identifying themselves as Biharis thanked me for drawing attention to what had happened to them. Mercifully scholars and commentators regardless of nationality, including Bangladeshi and Indian, proved appreciative and encouraging, while providing constructive criticism that made the study stronger.

A real challenge in writing this book has been to find the right balance between detachment and involvement. Early in the study, after interviewing General Niazi, I mentioned to him that I was trying to write about 1971 without emotion. 'No, keep the emotion', he had said, 'your writing will be the better for it'. Over the years I have come round to agreeing with that view. Without an emotional connection to the memories of 1971, I would not have been motivated to do this work. The challenge was not to write a work shorn of all emotion, but one in which emotion did not blind one to reality. The conflicting memories of 1971 tell a human story, and it would be impossible to humanise the conflict without emotional empathy for the subject.

I started the study with enormous sympathy for the Bangladeshis as 'victims' in a conflict in which they had justice on their side—the other side, after all, was a military regime that had refused to let a legitimately elected party assume the powers of government and tried to suppress the Bengali rebellion by military force. I agreed with the complaint that the traumatic birth of Bangladesh had been quickly marginalised in the discourse on world politics, but was less sure of the reasons. Perhaps it was because Bangladesh was a poor

'brown' country, as many Bengalis believe, with no role to play in the remainder of the Cold War. However, Bangladeshis were clearly also responsible for their own marginalisation, having failed to produce well-documented and analytical histories of the 1971 conflict in thirty years of independence. I expected my work to start the process of filling that void, by careful chronicling and thoughtful analyses of a few events on the ground that would provide insights on the conflict as a whole.

By the end of the study, I still had enormous sympathy for those who had truly suffered in the 1971 conflict, but who they were had changed substantially along with the story-line. The Bengalis splintered into many fragments—those who wanted an independent Bangladesh, those who supported a united Pakistan, those who desired autonomy but not secession, those who actively fought for whichever side they supported, and those who like Doctor Zhivago wanted to 'just live' but got caught up in the upheaval nevertheless. There were combatants and non-combatants, victims of violence and its perpetrators. The West Pakistanis did not present a united front either, politically or militarily, and the armed forces ranged widely in the manner in which they carried out martial law duties or counter-insurgency operations in East Pakistan.

In the terrible violence of a fratricidal war the victims were from every ethnic and religious group and from both sides of the political divide, and so were the perpetrators, as is normal. Humanity was just as normally distributed. Both sides had legitimate political arguments and their idealistic followers, along with those who indulged in opportunism, expediency and inhumanity. Many Bengalis—supposed to be fighting for freedom and dignity—committed appalling atrocities; many Pakistan Army officers, carrying out a military action against a political rebellion, turned out to be fine men doing their best to fight an unconventional war within the conventions of warfare. Moreover, the war turned out not to have been a battle between East and West Pakistan, nor between democracy and authoritarianism. It defies all such easy dichotomies, particularly those aspiring to be approximations of 'good' and 'evil'. If some of this seems but natural in conflicts of this nature, it is yet to touch the discourse on the 1971 war. Many things taken to be established facts in the dominant narrative with which I grew up were demonstrated to be either false or seriously distorted; equally, the study revealed events and aspects that were entirely missing from the discourse so far.

The book is organised roughly chronologically, exploring the contours of the conflict through the detailed study of particular incidents. Chapter 1 ('Call to Arms') highlights some of the overlooked or misrepresented aspects of the

1970 general elections, the subsequent failed negotiations and the nature of the Bengali nationalist agitation that erupted in East Pakistan. Chapter 2 ('Military Inaction') focuses on the period 1 March to 25 March, when East Pakistan appeared to be ruled by a parallel government of Sheikh Mujib's decrees. Chapter 3 ('Military Action') investigates the start of the military action to suppress the Bengali rebellion, examining in detail the attack by the Pakistan army on Dhaka University on 25–26 March 1971. Chapter 4 ('Uncivil War') chronicles and analyses through ten different case-studies the bitter and bloody civil war that engulfed the province in the following weeks. Chapters 5 and 6 ('Village of Widows' and 'Hounding the Hindus') focus on single major incidents during the war to examine the widely made allegations of civilian massacres and the persecution of Hindus, followers of the majority Indian religion. Chapter 7 ('Hit and Run') depicts selected cases of the 'underground' fighters for Bangladesh's liberation and the response of some of the army units in a long war of attrition. Chapter 8 ('Fratricide') assesses the bitter bloodletting in the last days of the war and the first months of Bangladesh's independence, including the widely reported killing of intellectuals in Dhaka in the dying days of the war. Chapter 9 brings together many different strands of the story, to examine the deployment of words and numbers in the narratives of 1971, including the question of whether there was 'genocide' of 'three million Bengalis' during 1971.

A longstanding theme of the 1971 conflict, confirmed by the study in unexpected ways, is the state of denial in Pakistan: a refusal to confront what really happened in East Pakistan. However, the study revealed a greater state of denial in Bangladesh and to some extent in India with regard to the true nature of the conflict. In many ways the subsequent political formations in Bangladesh have been fighting out the battles of 1971 ever since, each constructing its own version of history. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of this trend is the tendency on the part of pro-liberation Bangladeshis to deny, minimise or justify the brutalities committed by Bengali nationalists against non-Bengalis and non-nationalists during 1971. The culture of violence fomented by 1971 explains much of what happened in Bangladesh subsequently and the cultivated mythologies of all sides aim to bequeath the legacies of hatred to successive generations.

By the end of the study I had a far better understanding as to why the fairy-tale ending of 1971 for Bangladesh went so horribly wrong. As Sheikh Mujib arrived in Dhaka on 10 January 1972 via London and Delhi to collective euphoria, Peter Hazelhurst reported in *The Times* on public resentment

towards the Indians, the 'liberators' greeted with flowers only a few days before, disillusionment with the new government, and 'a xenophobia so deep that only those who speak East Bengali with a pure dialect are considered sons of the soil'. Within months of the creation of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujib and his party the Awami League, who had fought the war in the name of democracy, turned the country into a personal autocracy formalised later as a one-party state. In August 1975 Bengali army officers who had supported the liberation movement assassinated Mujib and massacred his entire family except for two daughters who were away at the time. Several former 'freedom fighters' and Mujib's cabinet colleagues were imprisoned and then murdered in jail. Bengali army officers who had fought for Bangladesh's liberation then fought each other in coups and counter-coups until General Zia-ur Rahman prevailed. Zia was assassinated in a coup in 1981 and Bangladesh remained under military rule until the 1990s. A new era of democratic politics thereafter manifested itself as an implacable rivalry between the daughter of one slain leader and the widow of another. Violence as the answer to political difference remains the dominant political currency.

Meanwhile, the remaining part of Pakistan also returned to lengthy periods of military rule and is still fighting armed rebellion in its other provinces. India intervened with military force in a neighbouring country again in 1975, annexing the kingdom of Sikkim, and Indira Gandhi—'deliverer' of freedom and democracy in Bangladesh—tried to impose personal dictatorship in India. Both wings of the 'Muslim nation' broken by the 1971 war—Pakistan and Bangladesh—remain dogged by concerns that they are 'failed' or 'failing' states and are perceived to be involved on both sides of the 'global war on terrorism'.

No doubt the future will see many more histories of 1971 written with the detachment of time and distance and perhaps with the benefit of archival access. The study of the conflict of 1971 and its long-term impact will be further enriched by that process. However, two vital elements that breathe life into this book will be missing from those works. The people who lived out the conflict at the ground level will have passed away, and future authors will not have the inexpressible connection that I have with 1971. I am, after all, of the last generation that still has memories of 1971 to reconcile.

1

CALL TO ARMS

BENGALI NATIONALIST REBELLION

'The Bengalis are a very cultured people. A love of fine arts is their hallmark. Their music is so rhythmic, and the language so sweet, ... As an agitated group, however, they are like a swarm of honey bees—when disturbed, they go on the rampage without distinguishing between the culprit and the innocent bystander, and once excited, seem not to care even for their own safety'.

– Maj. Gen. Hakeem Arshad Qureshi, Pakistan Army[1]

'Hundreds of Bengalis were rushing from their shops and offices, shouting and screaming in what was obviously a spontaneous display of anger. To my mind they were like a swarm of bees that had been disturbed in their hive'.

– Archer Blood, Consul-General of the United States in Dhaka, 1971[2]

An unlikely pair—an American diplomat and a Pakistani general, who were both in East Pakistan in 1971—curiously came to the same judgment about Bengalis in a state of agitation. Archer Blood was the American Consul-General in Dhaka who became famous for his condemnation of the Pakistan regime's military action against the Bengali rebellion and of his own government's unwillingness to condemn it. Hakeem Arshad Qureshi is a Pakistani general who fought against the Bengali nationalist rebels in East Pakistan. Both men were in East Pakistan in March 1971 when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Bengali nationalist politician leading the rebellion, launched the mass movement that became the final political phase of the secession of East Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh as a separate country.

Yet, only three months before in December 1970, the military regime of General Yahya Khan had held what is widely acknowledged to have been the first free and fair elections in Pakistan. The systemic manipulations of previous regimes had been rejected in favour of universal adult suffrage on the principle of 'one person one vote', which guaranteed the more numerous Bengalis of East Pakistan a democratic edge. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League had won a majority in the election. After talks with him in January 1971, 'Yahya referred to Mujib as the next prime minister of Pakistan, adding that his own job was finished, that he was preparing to leave office, and that the transfer of power would occur soon'.[3] It should have been the dawn of a new era of democratic federalism in Pakistan. Instead, the country broke in two.

'There are two basic problems here', wrote Henry Kissinger in a secret memo to President Nixon on 13 March 1971, '1) Rahman has embarked on a Gandhian-type non-violent non-cooperation campaign which makes it harder to justify repression; and 2) the West Pakistanis lack the military capacity to put down a full scale revolt over a long period'.[4]

Kissinger was right about the second point, but dead wrong about the first. The rebel movement in East Pakistan led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman bore no resemblance to the path of non-violence advocated by Gandhi against British rule in India. Yet that is the way the Bengali agitation is characterised by numerous sources, Bangladeshi, Indian and others. Perhaps it makes it easier to portray the conflict in East Pakistan in starker terms—as a clash between 'civilian' and 'military', 'Bengali' and 'West Pakistani', 'popular democracy' and 'military dictatorship', 'non-violent' and 'violent'. But the simplification leads to inaccuracy, and confuses the analysis of what happened that year in East Pakistan and in subsequent years in independent Bangladesh. This chapter highlights some of the overlooked or misrepresented aspects of the successful elections, the failed negotiations and the Bengali nationalist agitation that culminated in civil war, a new India-Pakistan war and the second 'partition' of South Asia to create Bangladesh.

The First Free and Fair Election[5]

In March 1969 General Ayub Khan, the military ruler of Pakistan who had seized power in 1958, was replaced by General Yahya Khan. The struggle of democratic forces against military rule was not peculiar to Bengalis or to East Pakistan—it was an all-Pakistan issue, with mass movements in the Western as well as the Eastern wing of the country since 1968. With the waning of Gen.

Ayub Khan's power, his former Foreign Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto joined the opposition forces with a new party, the Pakistan's People's Party (PPP).

As President and Chief Martial Law Administrator, Gen. Yahya Khan took several steps that indicated his commitment to an early transfer of power to an elected, civilian government. By August 1969 the military council was replaced by a civilian cabinet. Gen. Yahya held discussions with leaders of political parties about the system of elections and government. A drafting committee worked on the guidelines for a new electoral system and constitution and its results were made public in November1969.

The new military ruler was sensitive to Bengali grievances—'Yahya Khan's declarations made it clear that he recognised the legitimacy of East Pakistan's economic grievances against the West, an issue that had emerged as the country's most massive problem *after* Ayub Khan's fall'.[6] He also discarded the 'principle of parity' that had featured in previous constitutions, opting for direct elections on universal franchise—a move favoured by the more numerous Bengalis in East Pakistan, to whom it gave a natural advantage.

In March 1970, a year after he took power, General Yahya announced these guidelines as the Legal Framework Order under which national and provincial elections would be held in October 1970. Owing to severe floods in East Pakistan that year, followed by a devastating cyclone, the election was held in December 1970. By all accounts the military was neutral during the elections and these were the first free and fair elections with universal adult franchise in Pakistan. General Yahya Khan remains the only military ruler of Pakistan who actually kept his word on returning the country to democracy one year after taking power. He then proceeded to preside over civil war, war with India, defeat and the dismemberment of his country.

Regional Contests as National Election

Sheikh Mujib's Awami League concentrated on East Pakistan and contested only 7 out of 138 seats in West Pakistan. Similarly, Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party focused on West Pakistan and did not field any candidates at all in East Pakistan. Many smaller parties that participated officially in both wings actually drew their leadership and support from a single region. Party leaders focused on their own areas only. As Sisson and Rose put it, 'The elections in essence thus involved two separate campaigns—one in the east, one in the west'.[7]

If the natural process of democracy led to a parochial composition of parties and leaders, the only way to create a 'national' platform might have been to

construct it artificially through manipulation of the political system. But Yahya Khan declined to do that, arguing that the rules of the process needed to reflect the wishes of the major political leaders and parties, as otherwise they would not participate. When those who had reservations about direct elections based on universal franchise tried to tell him that the political leaders were all 'provincial' in their outlook, 'Yahya reportedly replied by asking who the leaders of national stature were: 'Let them come forward, I want to see them and talk with them'.[8] This military ruler appears to have recognised that he had to work with the politicians the country actually produced, rather than try to create more 'ideal' ones by artificial means.

By 1970 many Bengalis of East Pakistan already felt alienated from their West Pakistani brethren in a process that seems to have started from the very inception of Pakistan in 1947.[9] There were demands for greater regional autonomy as well as a fair share of power and economic benefits for Bengalis. Sheikh Mujib came up with a 'Six Point' demand for major constitutional changes to address Bengali grievances.[10] His campaign took full advantage of the sense of alienation and 'victimisation' among Bengalis. Many of those who were opposed to him have described the year-long campaign in East Pakistan as a campaign of 'hatred' by Sheikh Mujib and the Awami League against West Pakistanis, alleging discrimination and 'colonial' exploitation of the East by the West. The natural calamities of floods and cyclones, with the inevitable human suffering, served to further sharpen a popular sense of grievance.

There is no doubt that Bengalis perceived themselves as victims of long-standing discriminatory and exploitative policies, even though they sometimes cited the wrong statistics to 'prove' it—that is, statistics that showed 'disparity' but not necessarily 'discrimination'. East Pakistan was poorer and economically weaker than West Pakistan at the formation of the country in 1947, and there were historically few East Pakistanis in the civil service, the armed forces and managerial positions. Disparity, therefore, was a reality, and it could not vanish overnight. The question of whether there was discrimination required the scrutiny of other statistics—for instance, ones that would show whether opportunities were being fairly opened up to East Pakistanis.

The true extent of 'discrimination' is a matter of controversy, but Bengali grievance about feeling 'second-class' in Pakistan was real, and a potent political issue.[11] The politics of grievance may well have overtaken any actual discrimination. G.W. Choudhury, a Bengali who served in the Ayub and Yahya regimes and felt that the economic disparity was a real and serious issue that

had been inadequately addressed, nevertheless wrote: 'The Bengalis are noted for a negative and destructive attitude rather than for hard work and constructive programmes; they also have a tremendous tendency to put the blame on others. In pre-Independence days, they blamed the British and then the Hindus, with whom they could not compete in any sphere of life'.[12]

His assessment is similar to that of another East Bengali known for his acerbic evaluation of his own people: 'There is among East Bengal Muslims a very widespread and acute sense of grievance against West Pakistan, and, what is more disquieting, a disposition to accept and gloat on the grievances in self-pity rather than to show a determination to get rid of the grievances by taking practical and energetic steps', wrote Nirad C. Chaudhuri after the elections in East Pakistan. 'But in this attitude I see a similarity in all Bengalis, Hindu or Muslim, to court suffering in order to nurse self-pity by way of emotional satisfaction'.[13]

A Polarised Result

Since the election was 'provincial' in nature, the results would be expected to reflect its 'parochial' characteristic. Yet the sheer extent of the polarisation seems to have taken observers and participants alike by surprise. Maulana Bhashani, a radical rival to Sheikh Mujib, withdrew from the elections late in the year. Mujib's Awami League won 160 of the 162 seats in East Pakistan, with 75 per cent of the votes cast in East Pakistan. It won nothing in West Pakistan. This meant that its national vote-share was 38 per cent but in a national assembly of 300 seats, 160 seats from the East gave the Awami League a clear majority on its own with 53 per cent of the total seats. Nurul Amin and Raja Tridiv Roy, the Chakma chief, won the two remaining seats in East Pakistan.

In West Pakistan, Bhutto's PPP won 62 out of 82 seats in Punjab and 18 out of 27 seats in Sind. With another seat from the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), the PPP held 81 out of the 138 seats in West Pakistan (and none in East Pakistan where it had not contested). It had 20 per cent of the national vote-share and 27 per cent of the seats nationally (though 59 per cent of the seats of West Pakistan).

Though Sheikh Mujib clearly received a resounding mandate from East Pakistan with 75 per cent of the votes cast and nearly all of the seats, there is one odd statistic in the voter turnout. In a politically conscious electorate such as East Bengal, a strongly emotional issue such as discrimination, demand for regional autonomy or potential secession would be expected to lead to a high

voter turnout in East Pakistan. Curiously, the voter turnout in East Pakistan was relatively low at 56 per cent—lower than the turnout in Punjab (67 per cent) and in Sind (58 per cent Turnout in the NWFP and Balochistan was 47 per cent and 39 per cent respectively. It would appear that 44 per cent of the voters in East Pakistan had not been exercised enough about a major constitutional change for their province—which might even result in secession—to even come out and vote.

While turnout was relatively low, Sheikh Mujib clearly had been successful in getting out 'his' vote—those who voted had voted overwhelmingly for the Awami League. The vote-share of 75 per cent of the 56 per cent turnout meant that 42 per cent of the total electorate in East Pakistan had spoken in favour of the Awami League. This may have included those who wished to secede from Pakistan altogether, but also many who were voting for greater regional autonomy and redress of economic and other grievances. As G.W. Choudhury points out, at no point during the elections did Sheikh Mujib say that a vote for him was a vote for a separate state, and after winning the elections he continued almost until the day of military action to negotiate a political arrangement that would enable him to become prime minister of the whole of Pakistan.

Negotiations to Nowhere

Winning the elections gave Sheikh Mujib and the Awami League an opportunity to redress the regional disparity or discrimination that they complained about. Despite some ups and downs in the three months that followed, there was optimism until the very end, at least till 23 March if not 25 March 1971, that a political arrangement would be worked out to accommodate the polarised results of the election among the three major players that emerged—General Yahya Khan, Sheikh Mujib and Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto.

While several interesting commentaries on the protracted negotiations are available, conclusive analyses of why they failed can only be done by future scholars if and when the relevant archival material, including alleged taped conversations among the leaders and their teams, is made available.[14] The picture that emerges from the available material is again somewhat counter-intuitive, in that it is the military ruler, General Yahya Khan, who appears to have made strenuous efforts to bringthe politicians, Mujib and Bhutto, to the negotiating table to arrive at a means of transferring power to the new assembly and an elected government. When Mujib refused to go to West Pakistan, Yahya came to Dhaka, as did Bhutto, eventually, and the other West Pakistani leaders. Yahya's mediation had to go to extraordinary lengths:

... neither Mujib nor Bhutto would look more than obliquely at the other, and at first they refused to converse, each sitting half turned away from the other. The president chided them about their behavior, indicating that they appeared to be bashful newly-weds rather than contenders for leadership of an important country. Yahya took them by the hand and encouraged them to honour the rules of courtesy that such situations required.[15]

Mujib was justified in expecting to be handed power as the winner of the election, but seemed to have decided that he no longer needed to compromise on his 'six-point' programme for a total constitutional change in the country. Bhutto for his part demanded power without having won the election. Yahya found himself squeezed between the uncompromising attitudes and soaring ambitions of both political leaders, each of whom suspected him of giving too much away to the other. However, negotiations were conducted in qualitatively altered conditions following the postponement of the national assembly on 1 March. The announcement of the postponement set off an open revolt in East Pakistan. By all accounts, the federal government stopped functioning and a parallel government—by decree from Sheikh Mujib—ruled East Pakistan until 25 March.

Bengalis in Revolt

'Within one hour of Yahya's announcement 50,000 to 60,000 people, carrying bamboo sticks and iron rods, jammed all the roads in front of Hotel Purbani. Oh, what slogans! They burnt the Pakistani flag and pictures of Jinnah too. Sheikh immediately called the press and announced the "hartal" and a meeting at the race course on 7 March'.[16] An excited young student, Rumi, reported all this to his mother Jahanara Imam at the end of the day on 1 March. He had been all over Dhaka riding in a friend's Honda, attending meetings and hearing fiery speeches. His mother had been worried by his non-appearance all day, and the hamburgers she had made for him and his friends had gone cold. Rumi promised to eat half a dozen of them himself as they discussed the exciting developments late into the night.

Raja Tridiv Roy, the Chakma chief and one of the only two non-Awami League winners in the election in East Pakistan, was in Dhaka on 1 March to attend the national assembly which was due to open on 3 March. He was in Dhaka Club having a beer when the postponement was announced on radio. Within the hour there were slogans and processions, and shops, restaurants and cinemas owned by non-Bengalis were being looted and burnt.[17]

'As soon as the postponement of the Assembly was announced over the radio, the reaction in Dacca was violent. Mujib started what he termed 'non-violent non-cooperation', but it was not the Gandhian type of non-violent non-cooperation...' wrote G.W. Choudhury, in a rare refutation of the oft-repeated claim.[18] While the revolt certainly achieved nearly a total degree of 'non-cooperation', it was not 'non-violent' or 'Gandhian' in any way at all, either in articulated philosophy or in actual events on the ground. Yet, not only did Mujib refer to his revolt as 'non-violent', many others persisted with the label in spite of evidence to the contrary.[19]

The obvious reason for trying to appropriate the name of Gandhi and the non-violent struggle he pioneered against British rule is the legitimacy and moral authority that come with that association. It is of particular value as a contrast when the opposing side is a military regime. Yet, not only was the revolt in East Pakistan in 1971 not Gandhian, either in inspiration or in practice; Gandhian civil disobedience had never been particularly popular in Bengal. On the contrary, there were traditions of violent struggle in Bengal against British rule which the East Pakistani rebels could claim as historical legacy. Indeed, protagonists of the Bangladeshi liberation movement drew on these militant traditions as well, producing a confusing medley of inspirational claims to match the contradictory practices on the ground.

The US Consul-General in Dhaka, Archer Blood, was sympathetic to Bengalis' grievances and their sense of betrayal. As he watched people rushing in the streets, shouting and screaming, after the assembly was postponed without an alternative date, 'I knew what they were thinking... The election was not to be honoured'. He too reported what was happening: 'many individuals in the crowd are carrying clubs or *lathis* but thus far appear in peaceful mood... smoke rising several blocks away... Largest concentration of people in front of Hotel Purbani where top Awami Leaguers are arriving... Sheikh has just arrived. Crowd is calling on AL leader to hand over West Pak MNAs staying in hotel'.[20]

Anthony Mascarenhas, a Pakistani journalist, became famous for fleeing to England and writing an exposé in the *Sunday Times* of the military regime's brutal suppression of the rebellion. About events on 1 March he wrote:

> ... long lines of people were seen making their way to the Paltan Maidan, the traditional forum for public dissent. They were grimfaced and they carried bamboo poles, iron rods, hockey sticks, even coconut fronds stripped of their greenery... The crowd on the maidan had swelled to over 50,000 by 4.30 p.m. when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his associates began assemblying in the Purbani Hotel... After much shouting, a num-

ber of people broke off from the crowd and returned to the shopping area on Jinnah Avenue. There they smashed windowpanes, looted stalls and set fire to a clothing store owned by a West Pakistani. The trouble began to spread.

Meanwhile at the Hotel Purbani, 'A Pakistan flag was brought from somewhere and burnt without ceremony. The neighbouring PIA office had its windows smashed. Some youngsters also tried to loot the West Pakistani shops in the foyer of the hotel'. According to Mascarenhas, Sheikh Mujib's speech did not match public sentiment. He chided people for rioting and ordered stolen goods to be returned, but 'The angry people soon dispersed to rampage through the city. There were clashes all over Dacca that night between rioters and the police. Several cases of arson were reported along with attacks on the persons and property of non-Bengalis. When League volunteers tried to intervene some were roughed up by the irate crowds.... This was the start of a 25-day mass upsurge...'[21]

This was to become a pattern. On the one hand, Sheikh Mujib seemed unable to control the masses he had incited. On the other hand, his word was law and he appeared to encourage militancy. From the many Bengali reminiscences, despite some rhetorical calls for restraint by Mujib, the Bengali revolt was openly—and proudly—armed and militant. Huge crowds gathered to hear Mujib at the race-course on 7 March, '... they brought with them a variety of weapons—shot guns, swords, home-made spears, bamboo poles and iron rods'.[22] A slogan of the time was '*Bir Bangali ostro dhoro, Bangladesh swadhin koro*' (Brave Bengali, take up arms, make Bangladesh independent). Bengali reminiscences describe the crowds attending political rallies armed with weapons as if that was a perfectly normal thing to do.

The American Consul-General, for all his sympathy, noted:

There was an ugly side to the demonstrations which soon manifested itself in arson, looting, intimidation of West Pakistanis and foreigners, and confrontations with the Army. At the residential area 'Farmgate' Bengalis attacked the homes and shops of West Pakistanis living in the area. At the Intercontinental Hotel, the abode of choice of foreigners visiting Dacca, Awami League youths tore down the English signs... A student armed with a pistol fired a shot in the Intercontinental... The New York Times correspondent and his wife were attacked by teenagers on the street but were saved by the intervention of an Awami League patrol... an attempt was made, possibly by leftist students, to set the British Council on fire.[23]

The martial law authorities stated in a press note that in the first week of March, 172 persons had been killed and 358 injured in the disturbances—the

Awami League claimed the figures were higher. In the run-up to 24 March, there was 'a sudden outbreak of ineffectual bombings and shootings' against the American consulate.

Jahanara Imam found people on the street looking in a hostile manner at her American house-guest Kitty. Kitty, who was doing research at Dhaka University and lived with a Bengali family in order to learn the Bengali language, asked Mrs Imam why Bengalis were suddenly expressing hostility towards her. Mrs Imam writes that she responded by telling her the history of East Pakistan.[24] It is not clear whether that explained the violent xenophobic expression of a narrow ethno-linguistic 'Bengali' nationalism that had become the hallmark of the revolt.

At the more organised level weapons training started and military-style parades were held carrying weapons both real and dummy. Kaliranjan Shil, a Communist activist who survived the army's assault on Jagannath Hall in Dhaka University on 25–26 March, wrote that following the postponement of the national assembly on 1 March, and the start of the non-cooperation movement, as part of the struggle the student union started 'training in preparation for war with dummy rifles on the Dhaka University gymnasium field.... I was also taking training in a group. In a few days our first batch's training was completed and along with a girl-students' group three groups of us took part in a march-past on the roads'.[25] Photographs of marching girls carrying rifles appeared in the foreign media during this period and images of such gatherings and parades are displayed with pride in the Liberation War Museum in Dhaka.[26]

The invocation of Gandhi's name in connection with the Bengali uprising of 1971 is not only entirely inappropriate, it is patently absurd. Mujib, 'the apostle of agitation'[27] seeking power through brilliant oratory and electoral politics, did not speak the language of Gandhi or think his thoughts. Crowds did not go to hear Gandhi armed with guns, rods and spears. After a single incident of mob violence at Chauri Chaura in 1922, Gandhi called off his entire non-cooperation movement—for the sake of his principle—in spite of criticism and disappointment among his own followers.

In his 7 March speech at Ramna race-course Mujib exhorted his supporters to make every house into a fortress and fight the enemy with whatever they had (*'pratyek ghorey ghorey durgo gorey tolo. Tomader ja achhey, tai diye shotrur mokabila korte hobe'*). His followers did what he told them to do. On 16 March Jahanara Imam found explosives and bomb-making equipment in her sons' room. Yet though he thundered *'ebarer songram amader mukti'r songram,*

ebarer songram swadhinata'r songram' (this time our struggle is a struggle for our freedom, this time the struggle is the struggle for independence), much to his supporters' disappointment Mujib stopped short of a declaration of independence on 7 March, as he was still negotiating to become prime minister of all of Pakistan. The public had been inflamed by his incitements, and their violence had not been checked by their leader. They did not understand his double game of public incitement and private negotiations. According to Anthony Mascarenhas, even when he stopped in London in January 1972 on his way to the newly formed Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujib—Rip van Winkle-like—was still considering a deal with Bhutto which would retain a 'link' between Bangladesh and Pakistan.[28]

Some aspects of the Bangladesh movement in 1971 are similar to the violent underground revolutionary movement in Bengal against British rule at the turn of the twentieth century following the partition of Bengal in 1905 (rescinded in 1911). Another wave of militant activity occurred in the early 1930s, with incidents like the Chittagong armoury raid, or the assassination of successive British magistrates in Midnapore.[29] The underground rebels of 1971 are considered heroes and martyrs in Bangladesh, just as the earlier ones are in Indian nationalist iconography.

The violence that Sheikh Mujib's Bengali nationalist movement unleashed was a chaotic violence, not a controlled one. It was meant to exert tactical pressure, not serve as grand strategy. The most senior Bengali officer in the Pakistan Army wrote that he approached Sheikh Mujib several times during the political negotiations proposing a first-strike against the enemy with Bengali officers and men, but Mujib told him to wait for the outcome of his negotiations.[30] So, unlike another famous son of Bengal, Subhas Chandra Bose, who raised the Indian National Army to fight against the British, Mujib never chose the path of an organised armed struggle on the field of battle under a national political leadership.[31] After Mujib was arrested on the first night of the military action to crush the rebellion, individual Bengali army officers were left to jump ship on their own initiatives, resulting in multiple mutinies that exacted their own toll of brutality and spawned their own legacy of violence.

East Bengal had been a centre of the movement that had culminated in the creation of Pakistan in 1947 as a homeland for South Asia's Muslims. The territorial partition of India was accompanied by a terrible loss of human life in 'communal'—that is, Hindu-Muslim—killings in the run-up to partition and during the massive population transfer that accompanied it. Then, and in later 'communal riots' in India, observers compared the conflicting images of Hin-

dus and Muslims coexisting in peace for centuries with those of them periodically killing each other with savage brutality. A contemporary consensus arose that 'riots' were perhaps not spontaneous expressions of primeval hatreds but politically engineered events.

A mere two decades after the creation of Pakistan, East Bengalis accused their Muslim fellow-countrymen of 'colonial' exploitation and their rebellion in 1971 expressed itself through ethno-linguistic nationalism and xenophobic violence against non-Bengalis. As Michael Ignatieff has written about the Balkans, '... we are ending the search for explanation just when it should begin if we assert that local ethnic hatreds were so rooted in history that they were bound to explode into nationalist violence. On the contrary, these people had to be transformed from neighbours into enemies'.[32] The political alchemists of East Pakistan, who brought about such a transformation in 1971, need to be assessed on the basis of their own actions. Gandhi cannot be appropriated by just anybody who is able to get the masses out on the streets and bring government to a standstill, nor can Bose be appropriated by anyone who happens to pick up a gun.

2

MILITARY INACTION

POWER WITHOUT RESPONSIBILITY

President Nixon: '... *The real question is whether anybody can run the god-damn place*'.

Henry Kissinger: '*That's right and of course the Bengalis have been extremely difficult to govern throughout their history*'.

President Nixon: '*The Indians can't govern them either*'.

– President Nixon's phone conversation with Kissinger, 29 March 1971.[1]

When Pakistan's military government announced the postponement of the national assembly on 1 March, Sheikh Mujib called for a *hartal*—general strike—and the Bengali nationalist rebellion entered its final phase. By all accounts, from that point the Pakistan government effectively lost control of much of the territory of East Pakistan. Many Bangladeshis and Pakistanis have recorded the 'parallel government' run on Sheikh Mujib's decrees until 25 March. Though much attention since has focused on the military action started by the regime on 25 March, the apparent abdication of governance until that date is an intriguing and critical factor in the unfolding of subsequent events.

Writing about the period up to 25 March, the US Consul-General Archer Blood observed that Mujib was 'trying to walk a slippery path': on the one hand he made inflammatory speeches, on the other he asked the crowds to treat Hindus, Christians and Biharis (non-Bengali Muslims) as brothers and

not indulge in looting and arson. His party cadres started appearing in public with rifles and shotguns and the crowds that came to hear him clutched a variety of weapons. While Mujib threw down a challenge to the regime, he was still leading a political agitation, not providing alternative 'government'. Mujib's 'directives', which were widely obeyed whether out of loyalty or apprehension, were 'an audacious assertion of authority without any concomitant assumption of responsibility'.[2]

Raja Tridiv Roy, Chakma chief and elected MNA from the Hill Tracts, was trying to get back to Chittagong from Dhaka with his family after the postponement of the national assembly. He found that the trains were running not according to published time-tables, but on Mujib's orders. In his view—echoed in private to me by non-political or non-Awami League Bangladeshis—'The sanction behind Mujib's directives was not merely his undisputed leadership, but violence and the threat of violence by his armed Awami League cadres'. Meanwhile, violence including lynching of non-Bengalis, especially Biharis, became a daily occurrence. The police seemed inactive and the army mostly stayed in the barracks.[3]

Mujib was also slipping on his slippery path: at the much-anticipated rally on 7 March he delivered an electrifying speech, but stopped short of declaring independence. Many Bangladeshis have spoken of the feeling of 'let down' in the crowd—the public had been incited well beyond where their leader was prepared to go. Young people like Rumi were disappointed, while their older guardians thought Mujib had done the prudent thing.[4]

Anti-foreigner violence increased in Dhaka during this period. On 12 March two bombs exploded at the US consulate and one of the attackers fired a revolver. More shots were fired at the consulate on 15 March. Molotov Cocktails were thrown at American consulate buildings and the Intercontinental Hotel on 19 March. Bombs were also thrown at the Dacca Club, the British Council, American Life Insurance Company and American Express. However, the bombers and shooters were fairly inept, and did little damage.[5]

The sporadic violence in Dhaka was minor, however, compared with the reported arson, looting and attacks by Bengali mobs on non-Bengali people and property in many other parts of the province, sometimes with serious casualties. The White Paper published by the Pakistan government in August 1971 listed many such incidents, in which the worst loss of life appears to have occurred in Khulna and Chittagong in the first week of March. For instance, in Khulna several employees of the Telephone Exchange were reported killed on 4 March, and in the Khalispur and Daulatpur areas 57 persons (presumably

non-Bengalis) were reported killed with spears and '*da*'s (sickles) on 5 March. In Chittagong, hundreds of non-Bengali men, women and children were reported killed in Wireless Colony and Ferozeshah Colony on 3–4 March and their houses set on fire.[6] Maj. (Capt.) Ikram Sehgal, who belonged to the army aviation section of the Pakistan army at the time, told me that he flew over Ferozeshah and Wireless Colonies on 4 March; according to him the area looked black, completely burnt out.[7]

Even a severe critic of the military regime like Mascarenhas acknowledged the justified panic among non-Bengali residents of East Pakistan: 'The panic was not without foundation. Despite Sheikh Mujib's clear-cut instructions and the protective efforts of Awami League volunteers, there had been numerous incidents involving non-Bengalis in Chittagong, Khulna, Dacca and some of the smaller towns'.[8] However, not everyone saw the Awami league volunteers in the same light. The government's White Paper, and West Pakistani and Bengali pro-regime accounts, describe the Awami League members not as peace-keepers but as the leaders of the violent mobs.

'Mujib's Rule' and the Military

Major (Col.) Samin Jan Babar of 22 Frontier Force was based in the Jessore-Khulna area in March 1971. He had been in East Pakistan since mid-1970. Trouble had been brewing for a while, but after 1 March, it was 'Mujib's rule' in the province. Col. Babar felt that Mujib was given such a free hand during this period that even the fence-sitters among the Bengalis decided they would be better off if they stayed on his side. The army was told to stay inside the cantonment and not react to anything at all.[9]

Lt (Lt Gen.) Ghulam Mustafa of 55 Field Regiment had been stationed in Jessore since 1970.[10] He had felt the hostility in the air from the time he arrived, when he was shocked to be told that he needed an escort to come out of the airport. His unit had taken part in cyclone relief that year—he noted that even as they worked, Bengalis watched from the sidelines and complained that nothing was being done. His unit had then done election duty—there had been complaints from various parties of intimidation, but the army was told not to interfere in the electoral process and it didn't.

As open rebellion started in March, Bengali mobs tried to storm installations like the telephone exchange and food godowns in Jessore city. According to Lt Gen. Mustafa, initially the army tried to maintain order and there were injuries on both sides. But then the army was ordered to the cantonment,

which was outside the town, and Jessore descended to lawlessness until it was 'recaptured' by the army in April.

Curfew was declared on 2 March, and some violators were shot, but troops were withdrawn on 3 March—an action that Lt Col. (Maj. Gen.) H.A. Qureshi, then commanding the 26 Frontier Force in the Saidpur-Rangpur-Dinajpur area, thought was a grave error. The army remained under an order not to use force even in the event of curfew violations, unless army personnel were physically attacked. Bengali officers in sensitive positions remained free to pass on information to Sheikh Mujib. The curfew was violated with impunity.[11]

General Yahya Khan gave a tough-talking speech on 6 March and sent General Tikka Khan—dubbed the 'butcher of Balochistan' for his suppression of a Baloch uprising—as Governor of East Pakistan. 'If Bengalis were dismayed by Governor Ahsan's removal', wrote Archer Blood, 'they were close to being terrified by Tikka Khan's arrival'.[12] General Tikka Khan's appointment seems comparable in this sense to the appointment of Sir John Anderson as the Governor of Bengal by the British in 1931: Anderson had previously served in Ireland during a period of severe repression when British forces fought the Irish 'Volunteers' with the help of the 'Black and Tans', and it was expected that he would apply the same approach to the rebellious province of Bengal. But in 1971 the writ of the nationalist 'parallel government' in East Pakistan was such that the Bengali Chief Justice declined to administer the oath of office to General Tikka Khan.

The Awami League meanwhile mounted an effective 'blockade' against the army. Food and fuel supplies were blocked and shops and local markets would not sell the army anything. There was no fresh food—no fish, meat, vegetables or even milk for infants. The army's movement was disrupted, and army personnel were jeered and spat upon. In more serious incidents, army personnel were attacked and their weapons snatched. Some of these encounters turned deadly.

'The murder of army personnel, caught in ones and twos, became an everyday occurrence', writes Maj. Gen. H.A. Qureshi, 'In our area we lost Lt. Abbas of 29 Cavalry. With an escort of Bengali soldiers, he had ventured out of the unit lines to buy fresh vegetables for the troops. The escort was 'rushed' by the militants, the officer was killed, weapons were 'confiscated' and the Bengali members of the guard sent back unharmed'. Nothing seems to have been done about Lt Abbas' murder—it was considered 'inadvisable' to arrest the culprits or take any punitive action in the area. 'The inadequacy of our response emboldened the militants and demoralised the armed forces'.[13]

When Lt Muhammad Ali Shah of 18 Punjab heard in Dhaka that his course-mate Lt Abbas had been murdered, he realised there was something seriously amiss in the situation in East Pakistan.[14] Stationed in Dhaka since 1970, Lt Shah had experienced a rapid change in atmosphere. When he arrived in early 1970, Dhaka had been fairly normal and young officers like him enjoyed a good social life with Bengalis in popular places like the Dacca (Dhaka) Club. By October, however, the fiery rhetoric of the political parties had taken its toll—people were no longer as friendly at the Club. Hostility was obvious on the roads and in shops, though Bengali army officers were still friendly.

After the elections the mood changed for the worse, with numerous incidents of provocation including attempts to snatch weapons from army personnel. Army officers' movements were restricted and Lt Shah needed an escort to go out of the cantonment. By late February fresh rations were hard to get and officers and troops were all reduced to an endless diet of *dal-roti*. There was an occasion when a bank manager refused to honour a cheque written by Lt Shah, explaining that his full pay had not been deposited in his account as Sheikh Mujib had put a limit to how much army officers could be paid. One night Lt Shah received an SOS from another officer and rescued a West Pakistani family whose house and factory were being attacked by a Bengali mob. The family was evacuated to the cantonment and went back to West Pakistan. Non-Bengali families waiting for passage to West Pakistan would not leave the airport out of fear. The airport looked like a refugee transit camp.

Every loyal army officer I spoke to voiced frustration over the deteriorating conditions, lawlessness and provocations at that time, but reported that the army had remained under orders to remain within cantonments and not use force. Capt. Sarwar of 18 Punjab described how just beyond the barriers of the cantonment in Dhaka, nationalist Bengalis put up their own barrier, at which they stopped and searched West Pakistanis, even snatched their valuables, in full view of the armed forces which, following their orders, could do nothing.[15] Even Mascarenhas, the Pakistani journalist who became famous for his condemnation of the military action, wrote, 'It speaks volumes for the discipline of the West Pakistan army, that its officers were able to keep the soldiers in check during what was to them a nightmare of 25 days'.[16]

The start of the military action on 25 March did not restore the government's authority overnight—it merely marked the beginning of a radically different policy choice. It took the armed forces several weeks to 'recapture' the territory and establish the government's writ up to the borders with India.

But 'doing nothing' was also a policy choice. The regime's decision to keep the army in the barracks despite widespread curfew violation and violence, and tolerate—and thereby legitimise—Mujib's rule by decree, might be termed a policy of 'appeasement', while it hoped for a political settlement. However, the attempted policy of 'non-confrontation' seems to have translated into a suspension of governance—to the extent of not reacting even to the murder of citizens. Contrary to popular perceptions, the void left by the withdrawal of official authority was not filled by the 'parallel government' of Mujib's directives. Mujib was still challenging government, not running it. As Archer Blood put it, his was an assertion of political authority without governmental responsibility.

Writing about the descent of the Balkans into ethnic nationalist frenzy in the 1990s, Michael Ignatieff wrote, '... when people are sufficiently afraid, they will do anything. There is one type of fear more devastating in its impact than any other: the systemic fear which arises when a state begins to collapse. Ethnic hatred is the result of the terror which arises when legitimate authority disintegrates'.[17] For several weeks in the spring of 1971 there was effectively no government in East Pakistan. The failures of the Awami League leadership—its inability or unwillingness to control a population it had inflamed and encouraged to break the law—were matched by the failure of the regime to respond appropriately to attacks on life and property. If the decision on 25 March to try to impose a military solution to a political problem was wrong both ethically and politically, the decision to abdicate the responsibilities of governance in the preceding weeks could be considered no less so.

The Joydevpur Incident, 19 March 1971

'The military has shot at the public in Joydevpur, there is a reaction to that in Tongi and Narayanganj', wrote Jahanara Imam on 22 March in her journal-style book on 1971, 'People are newly inflamed by the incident at Joydevpur'.[18]

A more elaborate description of the incident in Joydevpur is given by the US Consul-General:

> The most serious clash occurred on March 19 when Army personnel opened fire on a crowd gathered at the Joydebpur railway crossing twenty miles north of Dacca. Apparently in an effort to prevent the Army from collecting arms and ammunition from the nearby Gazipur ordnance factory, the crowd had erected a barricade, including a railway car, at the crossing. Army sources claimed one person was killed after troops fired

in self-defense when the crowd attempted to seize weapons from the troops. A pro-Awami League newspaper claimed that twenty were killed in the firing.

Blood continues: 'Mujib condemned the 'random' firing on 'unarmed people'.... On the evening of March 19 Alamgir [General Manager of Esso in East Pakistan and Blood's chief contact with the Awami League] stopped by my house a bit out of breath. He wanted me to know that Mujib was concerned that the firing incident at Joydebpur that same day would make it difficult for him to present some compromise solution to his people at the same time the Army was engaging in "such provocations"'.[19]

This strange incident, which 'newly inflamed' the Bengali public, and which Mujib branded a 'random firing' on 'unarmed people' and tried to use as a bargaining chip in his political negotiations, occurred at a time when Mujib's word was law in East Pakistan and the army was restricted to barracks. What had really happened in Joydevpur market and why? Had one person died or twenty? The accounts of four eye-witnesses, two Bengali army officers who were supporters of the Bangladesh movement and two West Pakistani defenders of united Pakistan, are presented below. They serve to illustrate the variations of the testimony of different memories of a single incident of conflict during the 25 days 'Mujib's rule' in East Pakistan. The comparative analysis of the conflicting memories also helps arriving at conclusions about what might be confirmed as true, or confirmed as false, and what still remains unresolved or a matter of interpretation. The detailed documentation of this incident on the ground also illuminates the nature of the looming conflict over the territory.

The 'royal palace' of Joydevpur. The 2nd East Bengal Regiment (2 EBR) of the Pakistan army, part of 57 Brigade but comprising mostly Bengali troops and officers, was headquartered a short distance outside Dhaka at the '*rajbari*' (royal palace) at Joydevpur. Curiously, this was the seat of one of the most intriguing mysteries of twentieth-century Bengal, that of the reported death and alleged reappearance years later of the Kumar of Bhawal.[20] On 19 March 1971, at the Joydevpur '*rajbari*', the 2 EBR was preparing to receive its brigade commander, Brigadier Jehanzeb Arbab, for lunch.

Witness 1: Lt Col. Masud-ul Hossain Khan, CO, 2 EBR (Bengali): The Bengali Commanding Officer (CO) of 2 EBR, Lt Col. Masud-ul Hossain Khan, wrote: 'On 19 March my boss Brigadier Jehanzeb Arbab came to Joydevpur with 8–10 vehicles of troops. He said his purpose was to see our conditions

and problems. But I did not think that was true when I saw such a huge number of soldiers. There was a plot behind bringing so many soldiers. That was to disarm us. I was getting the impression for some days of something like this'.[21]

Lt Col. Masud wrote that out of a total of 900 troops of the regiment he had only 250 in Joydevpur. Of four companies, one had been sent to protect the Gazipur Ordnance Factory, two were in Mymensingh on the 'excuse' of 'Indian aggression', leaving only the headquarters company at the '*rajbari*'. He alleged that the real purpose of the assignments was to remove Bengali troops from the headquarters. He said the general public also thought the brigadier was coming to disarm 2 EBR, and had erected barricades all the way from Tongi to Joydevpur. It took Brigadier Arbab quite a while to get to Joydevpur after removing the barricades.

On their way back to Dhaka the visitors found their way blocked by a goods train bogie which the local people had dragged on to the level crossing. Lt Col. Masud writes that Brig. Arbab ordered him to remove the barrier, telling him to shoot at people indiscriminately ('*be-parowa*') if necessary—Masud puts these words in quotation marks, as though they were directly pronounced by Brig. Arbab.

According to Lt Col. Masud, after a while Brig. Arbab realised that he, Masud, was hesitating to shoot. So he ordered another Bengali officer, Maj. Moin, to shoot. Lt Col. Masud writes that he, Masud, told Maj. Moin to shoot in such a way that the bullets would go 'over the heads or below the feet'. Seeing this, Brig. Arbab allegedly ordered his own troops to open fire. The troops fired their 'machine guns'—'some people were killed, the rest ran away. Among the dead were two named Manu Mia and Khalifa'. Lt Col. Masud adds, 'It is necessary to mention that the local people were also ready with shotguns, rifles and spears; but how long could these last in the face of heavy machine guns?'[22] Lt Col. Masud says Brig. Arbab threatened him, saying that he needed to command his men properly. On 23 March Masud was called to Dhaka and relieved of his command. His second-in-command (2IC), another Bengali officer, Major Safiullah, took his place until yet another Bengali officer, Lt Col. Raquib, was moved from commanding 32 Punjab to commanding 2 EBR.

Witness 2: Maj. K.M. Safiullah, 2IC, 2 EBR (Bengali): Maj. Gen. (then Maj.) K.M. Safiullah, the 2IC of 2 EBR wrote: 'On 19 March, a strong armed contingent headed by Brigadier Jehanzeb Arbab Khan (*sic*) made their way to

Joydebpur to disarm the Junior Tigers. ... The 2nd Bengal's readiness to face such an eventuality did not allow the brigadier to proceed any further than mere show of force. On his way back, the civilians of Joydebpur courageously put up an impregnable barricade at the railway crossing resulting in a hot exchange of fire with two civilian casualties'.[23]

According to Maj. Gen. Safiullah, at 10 a.m. on 19 March the unit at Joydevpur was told that the brigade commander was coming to lunch and would also visit the Gazipur ordnance factory nearby. He also wrote that by 17 March the local people had put up fifty barricades between Tongi and Joydevpur, which were meant to hinder the West Pakistani troops but were also blocking supplies for the Bengali officers and troops. Both he and Lt Col. Masud had talked to the people, but the barricades had remained. Any taken down by soldiers were put up again elsewhere.

Maj. Gen. Safiullah added, 'Situation at Gazipur was also tense. Barricades were erected en route and the resident director of the ordnance factory, Brigadier Karimullah, a West Pakistani, was surrounded by the workers. We had to send our troops to retrieve the resident director'.[24]

According to Maj. Gen. Safiullah, at 12 noon 2 EBR received a message from Brig. Arbab that he was clearing barricades as he came along, but that they should also clear the road from their side and use 'maximum force' if there was opposition. 'Around 1.30 p.m. in the afternoon the brigadier with his retinue consisting of Lieutenant Colonel Zahed, Major Zaffar the brigade major, three Captains, and seventy other ranks landed at Joydebpur, full of pride'.[25] Maj. Safiullah seemed to attach special significance to the background of the officers accompanying Brig. Arbab—'the Lieutenant Colonel and one of the Captains were gunner officers. The major was an armour man. Of the remaining two captains one was an infantry officer while the other was a commando'. But he did not explain how this distribution might be different from the normal composition of officers. He also wrote that the seventy '*jawans*' (soldiers) were 'invincibly armed' with 7.62 mm Chinese light machine guns; however, that appeared to be the normal weapon carried by the troops at the time, and, as Maj. Safiullah himself confirms further along in his account, the Bengali personnel had the same weapon.

Safiullah admitted that he had his men at a high level of readiness with a view to rebelling at the correct moment. He wrote that Brig. Arbab questioned him about the state of readiness and probably guessed his intentions.

During lunch news arrived of a violent gathering at the railway level crossing of local people who had barricaded the road with a railway wagon. Brig. Arbab

ordered Lt Col. Masud to remove the barricade, using 'maximum force' if necessary. Maj. Moinul Hussain was sent with his company to the barricade, while Maj. Safiullah remained in the palace with the rest of the troops. Though he does not say so, Safiullah's description of what happened at the barricade must therefore be based on what he heard from Maj. Moin and others.

According to this version, Maj. Moin tried to tell the crowd—50,000 strong in the bazaar on market day—that the Bengali troops had not been disarmed, but they listened neither to him nor to the Awami League leader and a labour leader who were also present at the spot. After Brig. Arbab arrived he ordered the barricades removed; '... the crowd became more violent than before. The brigadier ordered Moin to open fire'. He also told him to take orders from his CO.

Matters were further complicated by the appearance of two Bengali soldiers, a driver and his helper, who informed the brigadier that they had been severely beaten by the crowd, and that five of them had been kidnapped and their arms and ammunition snatched. At Brig. Arbab's order Maj. Moin ordered his men to fire but added in Bengali 'fire below' or 'fire over the head'. Allegedly Brig. Arbab demanded that they 'fire for effect'. The crowd also opened fire. According to Maj. Safiullah (who was not present at the scene), 'The brigadier became wild and shouted "I want one dead body for one bullet. If you cannot handle the situation I will employ my troops"'.

'As the events took a dangerous turn, Moin ordered his men to fire for effect'. As someone fell down after being hit, the rest began to run away. According to Maj. Safiullah, '... random fire from the crowd injured some of our men. The captured Chinese sub-machine gun opened up from behind the barricade from top of the mosque on the brigadier who luckily escaped death'.

According to Maj. Safiullah, the clash continued for about twenty minutes, after which the crowd dispersed, the barricade was removed and Brig. Arbab returned to Dhaka, leaving instructions to put the area under curfew, recover the missing weapons and report ammunition usage and casualty reports of dead and injured to him. 'To the great disappointment of the brigade commander, our report showed two dead and a few injured. The brigade commander was not happy. He asked, "Why sixty-three rounds were fired for only two dead?"'[26]

Maj. Gen. Safiullah felt that the clash at the barricade could have been avoided if Bengali officers had been left to deal with it with tact and patience. He claimed the mob fired in 'self-defence' after the troops were ordered to fire.

The same night five (Bengali) batmen of battalion officers deserted with their weapons and ammunition. This finally led to the replacement of Lt Col. Masud with Lt Col. Raquib, who was a Bengali, but whom Safiullah accused of killing 'quite a number of innocent Bengalees' on 1 March while commanding 32 Punjab during an action in Dhaka against Awami League supporters—no details are given of this alleged incident.

Lt Gen. (Brig.) Jehanzeb Arbab declined to meet me despite many requests. There is no independent confirmation that he said any of the things that have been attributed to him by the rebel Bengali officers. However, I obtained the West Pakistani perspective on the day's events through the eye-witness accounts of Brig. Karimullah and Brig. (Maj.) Jafar Khan, both of whom knew Brig. Arbab, worked with him and were present at the incidents in Gazipur and Joydevpur that day.

Witness 3: Major Jafar Khan, Brigade Major, 57 Brigade (West Pakistani): Maj. Jafar Khan arrived in Dhaka in the first week of March to take over from the Bengali Maj. Khaled Musharraf as Brigade Major of 57 Brigade.[27] He recalled that Maj. Khaled Musharraf kept delaying his departure from the headquarters. Plenty was happening in Dhaka in the first few days of his arrival. General Tikka Khan arrived to take charge, General Yaqub Khan departed, and Sheikh Mujib gave his famous speech on Ramna race-course on 7 March—not quite declaring independence. On 15 March, the President, General Yahya Khan, arrived for talks in Dhaka.

According to Brig. (Maj.) Jafar, the brigade commander of 57 Brigade, Brig. Arbab, another officer and he had gone to visit 2 EBR in Joydevpur, with a platoon of about thirty troops. This totally contradicts the number of visiting officers and soldiers given by Maj. Gen. Safiullah, as recounted above.

The purpose of the visit to Joydevpur, according to Brig. (Maj.) Jafar, was to visit the Bengali unit and get a sense of the situation there. He said that they could not have gone there to disarm the unit—talks were on in Dhaka at the highest level for a negotiated settlement to the political impasse; the President himself was in town. Had there been any plan to disarm Bengali units at that time, the units in Dhaka would have been disarmed first. Joydevpur was about 20 miles away from Dhaka—it would not be the first place to be disarmed.

The visiting group had their lunch at the '*rajbari*' as planned. When they were starting back, the level crossing was blocked with railway wagons. There were hundreds of people. According to Brig. Jafar, the East Bengal company refused to fire at the crowd, so the visitors' own troops had to be used to fire,

and when the crowd dispersed, they themselves physically removed the wagons from the level-crossing. The crowd fired at the army too. A couple of people were hit among the crowd, and a couple of people were injured on the army side. The firing lasted about twenty to thirty minutes.

When the party got back to base in Dhaka there was much excitement, as for the first time the brigade commander had been attacked while visiting one of his own units. As a result of the visit, Brig. Arbab decided to remove the Bengali CO, Lt Col. Masud. He was replaced by Lt Col. Raquib, another Bengali, who had been commanding 32 Punjab. Thus Masud was removed from command and Raquib was removed from Dhaka.[28]

Witness 4: Brigadier Karimullah, Resident Director, Gazipur Ordnance Factory (West Pakistani): The very first entry in Brig. Karimullah's 'Log of Daily Events' gives an idea of life at Gazipur Ordnance Factory in March 1971:

2 March 1971

0915 hrs. About 3000 outsiders entered POF Factory Area with a view to get the POFs workers out. I threw them out at gun point with the help of MODC. This was NOT a harthal day except in Dacca. Road blocked in three places up to chourasta to prevent my going out, with men waiting on sides with spears, bows and arrows. I was declared a Punjabi Brigadier whose head must be taken.[29]

According to the log records, the days passed with constant friction and anxiety at the Gazipur factory, with Bengali troops and workers taking part in processions shouting for the heads of Brig. Karimullah and other West Pakistani and Bihari officers. All the non-Bengali staff and their families suffered harassment and intimidation, there were no rations, and the factory was closed as the Bengali East Pakistanis refused to work even after 2 p.m. which Sheikh Mujib had declared as the time when the daily '*hartal*' should end. Brig. Karimullah seemed involved in endless rounds of trying to negotiate with the Bengali staff and workers, requesting additional troops for protection of the factory and its personnel, and defusing crises.

On 8 March, factory workers formed '*sangram parishads*' (struggle committees) to work on behalf of the Awami League. They stopped anyone trying to leave the factory premises. Cheques of West Pakistani or other non-Bengali officers were not being cashed by the local bank. Brig. Karimullah needed a helicopter to go to Dhaka on work, and kept getting stranded until a means of getting him back again could be found. On 14 March he managed to get a ride back with the Bengali CO of 2 EBR, Lt Col. Masud, who agreed to take him on condition that he would not tell anyone. He found the airport full of West

Pakistani and non-Bengali families fleeing, abandoning all their property in East Pakistan. It reminded him of the partition of India in 1947. The West Pakistani and Bihari personnel and their families in the factory repeatedly spoke to him of their fear for their lives and asked to be evacuated to West Pakistan.

By 17 March, Brig. Karimullah became aware of a private army formed at the Awami League's orders, called the '*Shechha Sevak Bahini*'. Its members had shotguns in addition to the spears that practically every Bengali man seemed to be carrying, and were drilling every day. The '*sangram parishad*' men at the gates prevented any West Pakistani or other non-Bengali from leaving. The Bengalis, however, left whenever they wanted, especially to attend political meetings.

On the morning of 18 March, nine bus-loads of Bengali workers and officers left for Joydevpur to attend a meeting. Later that morning, Brig. Karimullah heard there was a rumour that the Bengali battalion at Joydevpur was going to be disarmed, and that the nine busloads of people had gone to protest at this order and to ask the Bengali CO, Lt Col. Masud, not to lay down his arms. He also found that his phone lines had been cut.

That evening, with the phone lines still cut, Brig. Karimullah spoke to Lt Col. Masud on the wireless: 'Lt. Col. Masud confirms that no such orders (to disarm) have been issued and it was all due to a misunderstanding. It seemed that the Battalion had the old 0.303 rifles and LMGs with them. After they have been issued the Chinese weapons, they were asked to return these old weapons to the depot and the telephone being tapped everywhere, the locals thought, that, because it was a Bengali Bn, it was being disarmed'.

To prevent the supposed 'disarming', the Bengalis had put up road barriers on the Joydevpur-Dhaka road and blocked the road to the railway station. Lt Col. Masud said that 'He himself had been dubbed as a Bengali traitor as he seemed to have agreed to lay down arms when called upon to do so by the West Pakistani Imperialists'. Lt Col. Masud said that he had called the local leaders to explain the situation and asked the civil police to dispel the rumour, but it was taking time to undo the harm. They also had difficulty getting rations as no army vehicle was being allowed to pass through the barricades, which were still up. A '*subedar*' of his security section told him that the '*rajbari*' at Joydevpur had been surrounded by thousands of people that day and the Bengali CO had to spend quite a bit of time convincing them of the falseness of the rumour about disarming them.

On 19 March at 1155 hours, Brig. Karimullah got a call on the wireless from the CO of 2 EBR, Lt Col. Masud, inviting him to lunch at the palace with his

Brigade Commander, Brig. Jehanzeb Arbab, who would be visiting. Brig. Karimullah accepted the invitation.

At 1310 hours he started off for Joydevpur in a jeep with three armed escorts, driving himself. He was stopped by the '*sangram parishad*' men at the gate, who refused to let him go for the lunch. They said they had heard that Punjabi or Baluch regiments were on their way to Joydevpur, and all the men were preparing to go there to stop them. Brig. Karimullah gave up and sent a wireless message to 2 EBR that he was unable to come to the lunch.

At 1340 hours, the hooters and sirens of the factory all sounded together. Beyond the gates, Brig. Karimullah saw a rushing crowd, each man holding spears, bamboo sticks, and quite a few 12 bore shotguns, 0.22 and other calibre rifles. They had heard through '*sangram parishad*' communications that Baluch or Punjabi regiments were coming to Joydevpur to disarm 2 EBR and take over the ordnance factory. They were going to stop them.

Brig. Karimullah contacted Lt Col. Masud again, to be told that all that was happening was that Brig. Arbab was coming on a liaison visit to his battalion for lunch—to which he had also been invited. The approaching column was removing barricades on the way:

After 10 minutes I get Brig. Jahanzeb on the set. Sorry to hear I could not come to lunch with him. Anyway on his way back to Dacca he would pay me a visit in POFs. Good God! His passing on the main chourasta on Joydevpur road, with about 10 or 12 trucks (so they said) full of troops had such a disturbing effect on my people. What will it do to them if he actually comes to POFs? He joked; did I mean today or for ever? I told him I meant today; he is most welcome some other time when conditions have returned to normal.

Brig. Karimullah went to the gates to explain the true situation to his workers. The '*sangram parishad*' members had also phoned 2 EBR and found out that this was merely a routine visit and a lunch. Brig. Karimullah explained that he had asked the Brigade Commander not to visit the factory that day, and also dispelled the false rumours about the disarming of 2 EBR. He told his workers they should not go to Joydevpur and should allow the visiting unit to return to Dhaka unimpeded.

At 1610 hours Brig. Karimullah checked with 2 EBR and was horrified to learn from the 2IC (Maj. Safiullah) that Brig. Arbab's column was stuck at Joydevpur market and there was shooting going on. Within minutes the sirens were on again and armed men were rushing everywhere, having heard of the shooting at Joydevpur market. Agitated men rushed into the premises, demanding arms and ammunition, and the siren. Brig. Karimullah gave them

the siren but threatened to shoot if anyone came towards the factory. At 1750 hours Maj. Safiullah called to say that the visiting column had left for Dhaka and curfew was imposed on Joydevpur. That night Brig. Karimullah slept with his M-16 rifle under his bed and a 0.25 pistol under his pillow.

By that evening Brig. Karimullah got an account of what had happened at the level crossing from Subedar Aziz of his security section. It was a '*haat*' (market) day, so it would be crowded in any case. Many more people had gathered at the instigation of the local Awami League representative, Mr Habibullah, believing that Punjabi/Baluch regiments were coming to disarm the Bengali battalion. On arriving in Joydevpur Habibullah found that no disarming was taking place—the Brigade Commander had come on a routine visit and was having lunch with his unit. The Awami League representative then tried to reverse his action, but it was too late. The excited crowd would not listen and pushed a goods train across the level crossing.

When Brig. Arbab and his column arrived there on their way back to Dhaka the Bengali CO of 2 EBR, Lt Col. Masud, tried for a long time to persuade the people to remove the barricade, but in vain. When the troops were pushing the wagon to one side, the mob opened fire, and the East Bengal Regiment troops fired back, killing two persons. An East Bengal ration vehicle was also attacked and one person was killed in that incident. The crowd kidnapped six East Bengal soldiers with their weapons.

The next morning the 2IC of 2 EBR, Maj. Safiullah, arrived at Gazipur to say that curfew was extended to Gazipur. Also, a couple of the missing weapons were thought to be with the factory workers—one Chinese rifle was recovered. Brig. Karimullah was also told that the CO of 2 EBR, Lt Col. Masud, had come in the middle of the night, removed the barricade outside the gates and given instructions to the *subedar*.

On 21 March, Lt Col. Masud came to the factory again and discussed the Joydevpur firing incident with Brig. Karimullah: 'It seems, when E Bengal jawans were trying to push the Rly wagons, they were fired at by not only shot guns but 0.25 rifles and one heavier caliber rifle and one automatic weapon also (probably a sten). Only then the troops opened fire in self-defence. Before that they even talked to the crowd for good forty to forty-five minutes to allow the troops go through unhindered, but all in vain'.

Judgment on Joydevpur. One of the striking aspects of the four accounts of the Joydevpur incident given above is the number of things both sides agree on: on 19 March 1971 Brig. Jehanzeb Arbab, the commander of 57 Brigade, came

to visit the 2 EBR which was part of his brigade; on the way to Joydevpur they had to clear many barricades that had been put up by local people who wanted to hinder army movements and who had been told that the Bengali battalion would be disarmed that day; the brigadier and his party had lunch at the battalion headquarters and started back to Dhaka; a large crowd, armed and violent, gathered at the Joydevpur market and put a railway wagon across the level crossing, blocking their way back; the Commanding Officer of the Bengali battalion and his officers failed to persuade the crowd to remove the barricade; the local Awami League activist, who had helped organise the gathering by telling people the battalion was going to be disarmed, realised that this was not the case and tried to reverse the situation, but the crowd did not listen to him either; both the army and the crowd opened fire at each other; two persons were killed; in a separate but related incident a group of Bengali army personnel coming towards Joydevpur were attacked and kidnapped by the crowd and had their weapons snatched, with another casualty in the process; the firing continued for twenty to thirty minutes; after two people were hit the crowd dispersed, the wagon was removed by the troops and the unit returned to Dhaka; as a result of the day's events the Bengali commanding officer of 2 EBR was relieved of his command and replaced with another Bengali officer.

Also clear from the accounts are the claims that were plainly false: contrary to what Sheikh Mujib claimed, the crowd at Joydevpur was not unarmed, but armed with a variety of weapons including guns, according to all the accounts, including those of both the Bengali officers. It was not a case of the army firing at the crowd only—the crowd fired at the army too, and attacked Bengali personnel coming towards Joydevpur. According to Maj. Safiullah, the Bengali 2IC who claimed to be planning a rebellion, one of the snatched weapons—a Chinese sub-machine gun—had been used to fire at the brigadier himself. It was not 'random firing' but the result of a barricade by an armed and violent crowd which refused to listen to either the Bengali officers or the Awami League activist who was instrumental in bringing them there. If the barricade had not been put up, or had been removed upon request, there would have been no incident. The provocation, if any, seemed to have come from the Bengali nationalist activists who had incited local people by telling them that the Bengali battalion was going to be disarmed, and from the mob that was armed, incited and out of control, rather than the visiting army unit from Dhaka. Contrary to Awami League claims, twenty people were not killed—two were killed in the incident, another possibly died in the attack on the unrelated vehicle.

The points of disagreement are essentially over how many officers and men came to visit, and for what purpose. The specific words spoken by Brig. Arbab, and their interpretation, are also open to contest. Regarding the number of the visiting party there is a direct contradiction: Major (Maj. Gen.) Safiullah, the Bengali second-in-command of 2 EBR, claims the brigade commander was accompanied by five other officers and seventy soldiers, while Major (Brig.) Jafar, the West Pakistani brigade major of 57 Brigade, mentions two officers and thirty men.

The Bengali officers claim the purpose of the visit was to disarm the battalion, even though no disarming happened; the West Pakistanis maintain that it was a normal visit to check up on the battalion (and, originally, also the situation at the ordnance factory at Gazipur). While it may be true that the visit may have been more than just a routine liaison visit—rather a specific mission for the brigade commander to assess the reliability of his Bengali battalion—the argument that its purpose was to disarm the unit at Joydevpur does not stand up to logical scrutiny.

By the Bengali officers' own accounts, only one company of the battalion was at Joydevpur. It seems unlikely that a brigade commander would come twenty miles out of the capital to Joydevpur to disarm just this one unit when no other Bengali unit in the capital or elsewhere was being disarmed. Talks were going on at the time in Dhaka between Mujib and the President in the expectation of a political settlement. Lt Col. Masud says he had 'only' 250 troops in Joydevpur, and that the brigadier came with a large party, heavily armed. But the visiting party had thirty soldiers according to Maj. Jafar and 70 according to Maj. Safiullah, and carried their normal weapons, so either way, the Bengalis far outnumbered and outgunned the visitors. Indeed, Maj. Safiullah claims that it was the state of readiness of his troops that made the Brigadier change his mind about disarming them after arriving at Joydevpur! The facts suggest that the brigadier came to inspect the situation and decided that the battalion needed change *after* his experience at Joydevpur. The Bengali CO who had failed to either persuade or control the crowd was removed, but he was replaced by another Bengali CO.

With regard to Brig. (Lt Gen.) Arbab's alleged orders to use 'maximum force' and 'fire for effect', it is hard to be certain. Arbab declined to talk to me and has not published his version of events. Brig. (Maj.) Jafar Khan, who served with him and was with him that day in Joydevpur, stated to me that Brig. Arbab 'led from the front'. Another West Pakistani officer—who did not serve with Brig. Arbab in East Pakistan—described him to me as 'merciless'.

While commanders may differ in their approach to defuse crises such as the one at Joydevpur market, Brigadier (Lt Gen.) Arbab could hardly be faulted for removing the existing CO from his job after this incident. As for his alleged unhappiness over the report stating the Bengali troops expended sixty-three rounds for two dead, the Bengali officer, Maj. Safiullah, insinuates that the Brigadier wanted sixty-three people dead, but alternative explanations are possible: after all it was rather odd to report sixty-three rounds of expended ammunition when there were only two casualties.

Perhaps predictably, the Bengali officers' accounts attempt to paint the West Pakistani visiting group in general and Brig. Arbab in particular in as black a light as possible—by the use of somewhat theatrical language and commentary—while positioning themselves as longstanding supporters of Bangladeshi independence, secretly working for the cause of liberation while still serving in the Pakistan Army. Maj. Safiullah's claim that the Bengali officers could have defused the situation without using force is not credible given his own account of how the Bengali officers tried to persuade the crowd and failed. They had even tried to reason with the public over the barricades the day before, and failed. The crowd was not listening to Awami League activists either. It was thoroughly incited and already armed and violent, and was attacking incoming vehicles and even Bengali personnel to snatch more weapons.

Indeed, the Joydevpur incident is an illustration of many aspects of the collapse of effective authority that happened in the province as a whole. The public were in a high state of excitement, incited by political leaders who were themselves negotiating with the military regime to take over power. The crowds were armed and violent, and had been encouraged in that direction by their leaders. They were further inflamed by the rumour, spread by the Bengali nationalists, that the battalion at Joydevpur was going to be disarmed that day. When the rumour turned out to be false, the crowd was beyond the control of its own instigators as well as the (fully armed) Bengali battalion. Civilians died in the clash. The Awami League immediately put out a figure of the dead that was ten times the actual number. A nationalist mythology started to spin by distorting the event, for example by claiming the army had shot without reason at unarmed people. Sheikh Mujib then tried to use it to strengthen his bargaining position in his negotiations to become the prime minister of all Pakistan.

3

MILITARY ACTION

'OPERATION SEARCHLIGHT' IN DHAKA

'So too should the night of March 25, 1971 live on in the annals of the young nation of Bangladesh as a night of infamy'.

– Archer Blood, US Consul-General in Dhaka till June 1971[1]

'There's nothing of any great consequence Mr. President. Apparently Yahya has got control of East Pakistan'.

– Henry Kissinger to Richard Nixon, 29 March 1971[2]

On the night of 25–26 March, the Pakistani regime decided to go for a military solution to a political problem. Arguably never the right policy choice under any circumstances, it proved to be catastrophic for Pakistan. A bloody civil war and full-scale war with India ended with the break-up of the country with East Pakistan emerging as independent Bangladesh. For the people of East Pakistan it caused a trauma that is yet to heal and for many Bengalis in the new state of Bangladesh, a rift filled with hatred towards Pakistan.

What triggered the launch of the operation is unclear. Political negotiations were on until the last moment on 25 March, when President Yahya abruptly left Dhaka. Some accuse Sheikh Mujib and his Awami League of being poor negotiators who took too inflexible a stand. Others, both Bangladeshi and Pakistani, suspect that the military regime was insincere about negotiating while hatching a plot to use force. The regime claimed that the Awami League

itself was about to launch an armed uprising. Bengali accounts show that some Bengali military officers were urging Mujib to undertake a 'first-strike', but that he was stalling, saying that he was still negotiating.[3]

Element of Surprise

From Henry Kissinger to the most hardline Bengali nationalist in East Pakistan, everyone was surprised at the launch of military action. After all, for all his fiery oratory to the masses, Sheikh Mujib was still negotiating to become prime minister of all Pakistan. Professor Nurul Ula of Dhaka University, who managed to take a film of soldiers killing people on the campus in the morning of 26 March, wrote that on the night of 25 March he had gone to bed early, relieved by the news in the papers that an agreement was imminent between Yahya and Mujib.[4] 'I have no idea what caused the breakdown in talks', said Kissinger at a White House meeting on 26 March, 'I was as much surprised as anyone else'.[5]

The immediate aim of the military action was to re-establish the writ of government in East Pakistan by displacing the Awami League—arresting its leaders, rooting out militant elements, disarming Bengali police and army personnel and taking over the communications media. There had been a contingency plan named 'Operation Blitz', prepared during the tenure of Lt Gen. Sahabzada Yaqub Khan in Dhaka. Gen. Yaqub resigned suddenly at the eleventh hour and Gen. Tikka Khan took his place as Governor. The military action launched in Dhaka on the night of 25–26 March 1971 was named 'Operation Searchlight'. I asked Maj. Gen. Ghulam Umar, then Secretary of the National Security Council, what the difference was between 'Operation Blitz' and 'Operation Searchlight'. He said that there was no material difference, but whereas the former envisioned achieving objectives with minimum use of force, the latter came to seek accomplishing them with maximum use of force.[6] However, Sahabzada Yaqub Khan's explanation was different: he told me that 'Operation Blitz' was the contingency plan for 'severe action' in case of worst-case scenarios during the elections, for example if there was a major disturbance, or if independence of Bangladesh was declared. In his view the plan had no relevance after the successful completion of the elections.[7]

Gen. Umar, who is dubbed a 'hawk' by Bangladeshis and Pakistanis alike, was at pains to minimise his role during the military strike. He was never in 'intelligence', he argued, but a mere 'Secretary' of the newly formed National Security Council, which, he said, never met as a body at all. He denied General

Yahya had a 'kitchen cabinet' of which he was a member. He was, however, personally close to Yahya and claimed that he had 'pleaded all night' with Mujib to come and negotiate with Yahya following the highly polarised election results of 1970, but Mujib had not come. Gen. Umar acknowledged that he had been in East Pakistan just before the military action, but said he returned to Karachi before Gen. Yahya did.[8]

In complete contrast to Umar, Maj. Gen. A.O. Mitha, also considered a 'hawk', has tried to restore his prominent role in the military action, from which he had been 'written out' by some of the other accounts. Mitha, the legendary founder of the Special Services Group (SSG) of commandos in the Pakistan Army, was called specially to East Pakistan in March 1971, under a 'very thin' cover story, as Maj. Gen. H.A. Qureishi puts it, to help with the gathering crisis.[9] He is straightforward and proud of his work at this time, in keeping with his reputation of being an honest and dynamic officer.[10]

Many Bangladeshis appear to harbour dark views about General Mitha without knowing anything about him. The most senior Bengali army officer, Brigadier Mazumdar, former commandant of the East Bengal Regimental Centre in Chittagong, paints a black picture of him, but cannot even get his name right, calling him 'Miththa Khan' throughout.[11] Mitha may have been a strict officer with firm views about dealing with lawlessness and insurgency, but he had no ethnic or religious prejudices, least of all against Bengalis. Born and raised in Bombay, he had fallen in love with and married a '*prabasi*' Bengali, Indu Chatterjee.[12] Indu Mitha is a Bharatnatyam dancer and a formidably feisty woman, who did not change her religion on marriage and kept the flame of classical dance alive in Pakistan even through Zia-ul-Haq's 'Islamising' regime. The Mithas spent three years in the 1960s in Comilla in East Pakistan. Mitha writes that Yahya, then GOC of 14 Division in Dhaka, did not tolerate West Pakistani officers talking condescendingly about East Pakistanis and told him to ensure that this kind of prejudice did not occur in his unit. When two West Pakistani officers did just that in the club one day, Mitha threw them out and Yahya posted them out the next day.[13]

Mitha, who was Quartermaster-General in 1971, was first recalled to East Pakistan on 7–8 March 1971 when the law and order situation had deteriorated gravely. Supplies had been stopped, labour was stopped from coming to work and road and rail movement had become dangerous. He visited all the cantonments for twelve days and 'sorted out' their problems. He was surprised to be summoned again on 23 March, arriving on 24 March to be told that 'D-Day' was the next day. Lt. Col. Muhammad Taj, who told me he was in

overall charge of the units in action in Dhaka, was also briefed on 24 March. He said the decision to act had been taken on 23 March.[14]

'I spent the night of 24/25 March and the whole of 25 March in Dhaka at the Eastern Command Headquarters', wrote Mitha, 'All the operations were going as planned...'[15] But were they really? As Sisson and Rose point out, the operation failed to achieve key goals: though Sheikh Mujib was arrested the very first night, most of the Awami League leaders escaped. The disarming of Bengali police and army personnel turned into a bloodbath in many places, with casualties on both sides, and many Bengali personnel escaped with their arms, to return to fight another day. The army did regain control of the entire province eventually, but it took several weeks to accomplish.[16]

'That Consul in Dacca doesn't have the strongest nerves', said Kissinger to President Nixon, referring to Archer Blood, who became famous for supporting the 'dissenting cable' of twenty of his colleagues opposing the US policy of non-intervention in the crisis. 'Neither does Keating (US Ambassador to India)', replied Nixon, 'They are all in the middle of it'.

Perhaps differences of perspective are only to be expected between those 'in the middle of it' and those at a distance. But do even people 'in the middle of it' all see it in the same way? Like 'Rashomon's' eye-witnesses, those who were present, who took part, who saw, and who survived in East Pakistan in 1971 all seem to have somewhat different stories to tell of the same events. And like 'Rashomon', in the case of 1971, even dead men have their say.

The Attack on Dhaka University

'88 for 99. Initially lot of fire was received from Jagannath and Iqbal hall. Roger so far over'.

– radio communication among Pakistan army officers,
Dhaka, 25–26 March night, 1971[17]

'For the first time in my life I saw people being killed, and that too injured people being shot in cold blood.... In the meantime two more batches had been brought and killed. The film recorded the three remaining mass killings'.

– Professor Nurul Ula, Dhaka University[18]

If there is a single event in the military action that has captured the imagination of critics around the world as symbolising 'a night of infamy', it is what happened in Dhaka University during the night of 25–26 March 1971. The spectacle of a military regime sending the army to crush a 'rebellious' university

put the conflict in the starkest possible terms for most people and earned the regime lasting condemnation. This is one of the most fully reported incidents, in the heart of the capital city, and, one would have thought, an event about the facts of which there would be little dispute. But 1971 turns out to be one of those conflicts where nothing is ever quite what it seems.

This chapter examines in detail what happened at Dhaka University on 25–26 March, through the memories of those present from both sides of the conflict. Other actions by the military that night included taking control of the police lines, key police stations and the television centre, arresting key political leaders, demolishing the offices of separatist newspapers, and, by the following morning, attacking areas of old Dhaka. Snatches of memories of these contemporaneous incidents are used occasionally for adding context to the story of what happened in Dhaka University.

Armed militants or unarmed students? 'On March 30 the Consulate General reported that the army had killed a large number of apparently unarmed students at Dacca University', note US documents of the time.[19] In his autobiography, however, US Consul Archer Blood writes, 'The students at Iqbal Hall, some of who (*sic*) had weapons, were either shot in their rooms or mowed down when they came out of the building in groups'.[20]

That there were weapons in the university and that there may have been a two-way battle at the student halls are elements that are usually missing in the popular narrative on the military action as told in Bangladesh and India, which merely highlights that the army killed 'students' (and professors) in the university. Presented that way, the army action at the university is simply depicted as a massacre of unarmed civilians whose political beliefs the regime did not like. Yet not only is this a distortion of the true picture, it is also not the only possible Bengali nationalist representation of events at Dhaka University, especially with regard to the student halls.

In the preceding weeks, Bengali nationalists had openly flaunted their militant defiance of the military regime. Dhaka University was a centre of this defiance. Normal university activities had closed down from the beginning of March. Many college and university students all over the province had gone home as there were no classes. Numerous media reports and Bengali nationalist reminiscences chronicle the amassing of weapons, military training, martial parades and incidents of violence in Dhaka, in keeping with slogans like '*Bir Bangali ostro dhoro, Bangladesh swadhin koro*' (Brave Bengalis take up arms, make Bangladesh independent).

So a different, but equally 'patriotic' Bengali nationalist narrative was also possible—one in which armed militants in the university might be described as waging a heroic, but tragically futile, battle against far superior forces and becoming martyrs to their cause. But the Bangladeshi nationalist narrative seems to have dithered between the two possible story-lines, largely abandoning the 'heroic' one in favour of 'victimhood'.

As Simon Dring wrote in the *Sunday Telegraph* shortly afterwards:

'The supporters of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman talked a great deal before the army crackdown last month about how they would fight, but they did virtually nothing about preparing themselves. They led noisy and often violent demonstrations, but they had no organization, no training, no weapons, and, as the army proved in Dacca, no real stomach for war'. 'In the capital the students, reckoned to be the militant hard core of the Awami League, lived in a similar dream world. They talked endlessly of fighting to the death. But they had nothing more than a few rifles from the 1939–45 war, equally ancient pistols, and some home-made bombs which, when the army moved in on March 25, were apparently not used. Once the shooting started the jeering, the shouting, the open defiance of the military might of the Pakistan Government died a quick death'.[21]

Just as the Bengali nationalists seemed to Dring to have 'no real stomach for war', they seem to have no real stomach for a 'heroic' version of their struggle, preferring a 'villains versus victims' version. The reality is that there were weapons, and training, and no matter how unequal the fire-power, a few Bengalis apparently did put up a fight. The 'victim' story denies them their true role while undermining the credibility of the narrative as a whole, as it is contradicted by Bengali eye-witness accounts themselves.

Kaliranjan Shil, a Communist activist who survived the attack on Jagannath Hall, the Hindu student hall in Dhaka University, wrote that after the postponement of the national assembly on 1 March, the student union started 'preparation for war with training with dummy rifles on the Dhaka University gymnasium field.... I was also taking training in a group. In a few days our first batch's training was completed and along with a girl-students' group three groups of us took part in a march-past on the roads'. Indeed, photographs of marching girls carrying rifles appeared in the foreign media during this period and are proudly exhibited in the Liberation War Museum in Dhaka.

'After this, those of us who were trained started training students arriving from different areas of Dhaka', writes Shil, 'Along with rifle-training the student leaders would explain why we were going to war... After 7 March the number

of normal students at the halls of the university began to diminish. On 25 March Thursday morning there was training as usual on the gymnasium field'.[22] Though Shil states that the initial training was with 'dummy rifles', he describes a full-fledged programme of preparation for armed revolt, throughout the month of March. Yet in the same account he describes the military action as an attack on '*nirastra*' (unarmed) students by the 'human-demon barbarian Pak army' (*noropishach borbor*). Having trained to wage war, he was apparently surprised and even offended that the enemy had actually attacked!

Shil also confirms that the students of Dhaka University had mostly left the student halls, and other people had arrived to take part in the training. Some of them may have been students, but they were not necessarily Dhaka University students. Similarly, Nazrul Islam also writes that his art college hostel had emptied of students who had returned to their village homes. As there were no students, the 'mess' (student dining hall) was closed and he had to eat in a restaurant. On the fateful night a friend who had come to Dhaka to look for a job asked to stay in the hostel with him.[23] The influx of militant outsiders, whether students or not, into Dhaka University during March may explain the later confusion over who and how many died there during 'Operation Searchlight'.

Two-way battle or one-sided massacre? 'What I was told, and have no reason to doubt, was that militant Muslim students had closed themselves in at the University and were well armed and bent on fighting it out', writes Maj. Gen. Mitha, 'They fought back when the army went to clear them out and some died'.[24]

In reality, there were both two-way battles and one-sided massacres in Dhaka University that night. It depended on where and when. Two-way battles occurred in the principal 'target' student halls, Jagannath Hall (the Hindu hostel) and Iqbal Hall. Killing of unarmed or disarmed people happened at the halls after resistance had been crushed and at the adjoining apartments of the faculty.

In the morning of 25 March, Professor Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta, the Provost of Jagannath Hall, had a nagging feeling of doubt about the newspaper reports of imminent '*samjhauta*' (understanding): the constant stream of processions that went past the Shahid Minar (Martyrs' Memorial) at the university did not speak the language of compromise. Their slogan was '*Bir Bangali ostro dhoro, Bangladesh swadhin koro*' (Brave Bengalis take up arms, make Bangladesh independent).

Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta was a renowned professor of English. Born and raised in Mymensingh, he was a graduate of Dhaka University and had received his PhD from King's College London. Like many in his generation, Guhathakurta's nationalism had its roots in British India. While in eighth grade in school, he had composed and recited a poem to welcome the Indian nationalist Subhas Chandra Bose, later President of the Indian National Congress, when Bose had come on a visit to Mymensingh. In 1971 Guhathakurta—a Hindu—was Provost of Jagannath Hall.

The Guhathakurtas lived in a ground-floor flat in a three-storey faculty apartment building (No. 34) just across from Jagannath Hall. His wife Basanti recounts that Guhathakurta expected to be arrested if the country's politics took a turn for the worse, but refused to abandon his post of Provost and go away somewhere as advised by some. The Medical College and the Shahid Minar commemorating the language rebellion of the 1950s were situated close to the Guhathakurtas' apartment building. At tea-time a music rehearsal could be heard in Professor Anisur Rahman's flat on the first floor: he was practising a new song, '*Amra bir Bangali*' ('We brave Bengalis'). At the student hall the fourth grade staff was being taught by the students how to parade. Guhathakurta joked with his staff member Rambihari Das that his chronic stomach pain might at last be cured. Then he stood by the Shahid Minar talking to the students, advising them to go away to relatives' homes and admonishing those who had come back on 23 March.[25]

Around 10.30 at night there was a lot of noise at the crossroads of the faculty apartment building, Jagannath Hall, the Engineering College and Shahid Minar. Young men were barricading the roads with water tanks and branches of banyan trees. When Guhathakurta asked them what they were doing, they said they had 'orders' to check every car that passed. They were a bit late. Capt. Sarwar of 18 Punjab had already been on a reconnaissance around Dhaka University by car in civilian clothes, along with a special commando officer, Bilal (who went to arrest Sheikh Mujib during the night of 25 March) and the Battalion Havildar Major, Naib Subedar Yakub.[26]

The force given the responsibility for Dhaka in the army action that started late at night on 25 March was 57 Brigade under the command of Brig. (later Lt Gen.) Jehanzeb Arbab. The brigade included 18 Punjab and 32 Punjab regiments, 31 Field artillery regiment and the Bengal unit 2nd East Bengal Regiment (2 EBR) stationed in Joydevpur. Just before the army action the Bengali Commanding Officer (CO) of 2 EBR, Lt Col. Masud, had been replaced by another Bengali officer, Raquib, who had been CO of 32 Punjab. On the night

military action started, Lt Col. (later Brig.) Muhammad Taj, who was originally from 18 Punjab, was commanding 32 Punjab, but was also in overall charge of all three units. 32 Punjab's task included taking over the Rajarbag police lines, some key police stations and the President's House. 18 Punjab under the command of Lt Col. Basharat Sultan was responsible for securing Dhaka University, the television station and Shankharipatti (a Hindu area in old Dhaka), and also for providing tank protection and guarding the Intercontinental Hotel.[27]

The Brigade HQ was set up in the area in Dhaka referred to as the 'second capital'. The Brigade Major, Jafar Khan, had arrived in early March, to take over from Maj. Khaled Musharraf.[28] Gen. Tikka Khan was in the Eastern Command headquarters at Kurmitola. All the other commanders were moving around as necessary. The operational HQ of 18 Punjab was set up at the race course, where Capt. Sarwar and Rafi Munir, the Quarter-Master of the battalion, were located initially. The battalion's A Company served as reserves at the battalion HQ under Maj. Madad Hussain Shah,[29] B Company was at Sadarghat with Capt. Muzaffar Aulad Hussain Naqvi, C Company under Maj. Jamil Masood was guarding the area of the Intercontinental Hotel and D Company, under Capt. Saleh Hassan Mirza, went to Dhaka University and Shankharipatti.[30]

As 'Operation Searchlight' got under way, Lt Muhammad Ali Shah of 18 Punjab had the task of providing close protection to the tanks with a platoon of troops.[31] Informed on the morning of 25 March that the action would take place that night, he was the last to leave the cantonment, with three Chaffee tanks that had turned up a couple of days earlier, and his mortar platoon. Shah marched a slow march through Dhaka that night, ending up at the Intercontinental Hotel by daybreak.

On the route there were felled trees put up as barricades which had to be pushed aside, and he heard firing in the area of the university and Dhanmondi (the residential area where Sheikh Mujib lived). A few dead bodies lay scattered here and there—no more than twenty or twenty-five total in the entire route through the night, in Shah's estimate.[32] Shah says he never thought the consequences of that night's action would turn out to be so devastating. According to him, there were only those three tanks in the whole of Dhaka and their main role was a 'show of force'. He said that the main guns of the tanks were never used that night at all, though the two smaller ones on the sides were shot occasionally 'to make noise'. The tanks, and his men, traversed along the main road. They did not go through any built-up area, the New Market or the university.

'Searchlight' at the student halls. A bright searchlight and heavy '*golaguli*' (firing), with bullets clattering through the roof as they hid under the bed—so recalls Rabindra Mohan Das, then a Class VIII student who lived in the staff quarters at the end of the field in front of Jagannath Hall.[33] He is the son of the aforementioned Rambihari Das, who worked in the Provost Professor Guhathakurta's office.

'Around half past twelve or one o'clock I was awakened by the noise of firing', writes Basanti Guhathakurta, 'Has the war started then?' I asked. My husband said, 'It's nothing—the boys are practising'.[34] The noise came closer; soon there were ear-splitting bursts accompanied by light. The house was shaking as in an earthquake. The Guhathakurtas took refuge under the bed as well.

'A tremendous explosion woke me in the middle of the night', writes Professor Nurul Ula, who lived on the third floor of the Engineering faculty quarters across the road from Jagannath Hall and its games field. Soon there was non-stop noise of 'bullets and mortars'. After a while some rooms of Jagannath Hall caught fire. Prof. Ula saw men searching the rooms by torchlight.[35]

Kaliranjan Shil, who had 'trained' for battle, also writes that he was awakened by a tremendous noise and was unnerved by the firing, the like of which he had never heard in his life. He certainly didn't fight. He spent the night lying flat on a cornice on the second floor, having climbed out of a bathroom window. Indeed, there is no mention of fighting by anyone at the hall in Shil's account. He writes about seeing parts of the hall catching fire, and the searching of rooms by torchlight, floor by floor. At one point the troops brought out Priyanath, the gateman, and made him open the main gate to the hall, and someone was shot on the other side of the wall from where Shil was lying on the cornice.[36]

Evidence of a two-way battle comes from an unexpected source. In the thick of the action there is a query over the army's radio communication network from the brigade commander about the situation in the university[37]:

'99 for 88. (*voice of Capt. Shafiq A. K. Niazi who is with Brig. Arbab, the commander of 57 Brigade*) Highest control wants to know as to what type of opposition has been faced in areas Jagannath, Iqbal and Liaqat. Over'.

'88 for 99. (*Lt. Col. Basharat Sultan, CO 18 Punjab*) Initially lot of fire was received from Jagannath and Iqbal hall. Roger so far over'.

A clarifying question follows:

'99 for 88. (*Capt. Shafiq A. K. Niazi*) Please let us know as to whether there was any automatic fire from other side and was there any grenade etc thrown. Over'.

'... for 99. (*Lt. Col. Basharat Sultan*) Lot of 0.303 fire. We have not heard automatic, nor we have heard any grenade. Over'.

The extent of fighting was summarised by the commander on the ground: '88. Once we opened with Romeo, after that we never heard any fire, but we have disposed of a few'.

Brig. (Lt Col.) Muhammad Taj, CO 32 Punjab, who said he was in overall charge that night, concurred that there was a battle at Iqbal and Jagannath Halls, with fiercer fighting at Jagannath. The Brigade Major, Jafar Khan, who was coordinating communication at the Brigade HQ, told me that the inmates of Jagannath Hall were asked to surrender over megaphones—the Bengali accounts do not report any calls for surrender.[38] Brig. (Maj.) Jafar thought the university took about three hours to secure, with Jagannath Hall taking the longest.

None of the Bengali eye-witness accounts, nor the testimony to me of Pakistan army officers involved in the action, nor the evidence of the recorded radio communication among them, mention Rokeya Hall, the women's hostel of Dhaka University, as a target of military action. Yet a story had circulated in 1971, repeated to me by members of the Bangladeshi intelligentsia, about the women's hostel being attacked and girls jumping out of the windows. In reality, like the other hostels, Rokeya Hall had also emptied of its normal residents before 25 March, and did not seem to have been a targeted building. Similarly, as attested in Jahanara Imam's book by a terrified resident of Mohsin Hall, the army did not go to Mohsin Hall either.[39]

However, the then Provost of Rokeya Hall, Begum Akhtar Imam, has recounted how her own bungalow was broken into by the Pakistan Army looking for adult men, arms and ammunition, and women students who had been taking part in armed parades.[40] According to Provost Imam, the total capacity of Rokeya Hall was about eight hundred. As political turmoil mounted, the girls started to leave the hostel and on 25 March 1971 there were only seven students left. When she was awakened that night by the military action, the seven women students were in the residence of one of the house tutors, Sahera Khatun. All seven survived unharmed and departed with their guardians on 27 March when the curfew was lifted.

Provost Imam has written that the army twice invaded her home that night. On the first occasion soldiers entered after breaking the gate, doors and windows, confronted the Provost at bayonet point and demanded to know where the men were. The Hall Superintendent Jahanara, the house tutor Sahera Khatun and a number of male and female staff of the hall were then inside the

Provost's house. She tried to shield the male gateman and bearers, explaining that they were only staff and poor people, but was shoved aside. Just when all seemed lost an officer appeared and ordered the soldiers not to insult women and to come away. The troops hit them with rifle butts and left.

A second group of soldiers appeared a short while later. They made everyone stand in a line outside while they ransacked the house looking for arms and ammunition. Mrs Imam has written that she twice ran out of the line to prevent a bearer from being taken away. The officer with this group appeared to have difficulty believing that she was the Provost. He demanded to know the whereabouts of the girl-students who had been marching with rifles in the past weeks, where in the hall arms had been kept, and whether those standing in line were all Muslims. Mrs Imam told him that all the women students had left, that there were no arms in the hall, and that they were all Muslims. The officer was threatening and abusive, and on both occasions troops looted items from the house.[41]

Capt. Sarwar of 18 Punjab started the night on a jarring note when he saw some troops kill a couple of people in a hut by the race course on suspicion that they were militants, when they might have just been watchmen. His wanderings during the night brought him to the Shahid Minar, which was being demolished. He saw a few dead bodies of rebels there. Someone with a pistol sprang out—Capt. Sarwar chased him down a cul-de-sac which ended in a toilet, and shot him there.[42] It took some time to bring down the Shahid Minar—an act of vandalism that added fuel to Bengali rage, and a pointless waste of time and resources, it would seem, as there was no military reason to demolish a memorial to the language movement of the 1950s.

Not everyone in the military was convinced of the strength of the resistance by Bengalis at the student halls. Lt (Col.) Muhammad Ali Shah had a feeling that in the first two or three days after the start of military action, rather 'bloated' stories of Bengali resistance, in terms of firing and numbers involved, were in circulation. There was an air of 'patriotic jubilation' among army personnel. The ammunition expenditure reported seemed to be inexplicably high. During the first two to three days the D Company of the battalion suffered two dead and about five wounded. However, Shah recalls that there was a large recovery of weapons of all sorts—in his estimate possibly up to 300 items, including guns as well as swords, improvised spears and so on, from the university. Two wagon-loads of weapons, some blood-smeared but most not, were carried off from there. Brig. (Lt Col.) Taj told me that Indian-made rifles were recovered from the student halls.

A few Bengalis fought, it would seem, while most did not. In a bizarre irony, it is the Pakistan army which says that Bengali militants in Jagannath and Iqbal halls refused to surrender, that they fought with their 0.303 rifles against the might of a professional army and died in the process. The Bangladeshi accounts either have sleeping 'students' who were doing nothing, or '*bir Bangalis*' (brave Bengalis) who trained, marched and talked, but when the moment came, did not have the 'stomach for war'.

Taking No Prisoners: Jagannath Hall

From the west side of the field, where the main dormitory of Jagannath Hall was, suddenly appeared about 20 Pakistani soldiers, along with two injured students. The soldiers brought the two boys with some care, supporting them on their shoulders, and sat them down by the two sheets—it appeared they would take them to the hospital. A bit later they pulled away the sheets—I saw that the sheets had been covering quite a few dead bodies. The injured two were sitting facing the east, the corpses were behind them. Two soldiers moved farther east, faced them and cocked their rifles—for a few moments I saw the two boys pleading with outstretched hands. Then came the bullets.[43]

Professor Nurul Ula writes that he witnessed this scene from the window of his apartment, which was on the third floor of the engineering faculty quarters, across the street from the field. Though there are some new buildings on the campus now, from my visit to the site I confirmed that he would have had a clear view of the field.

Next the soldiers brought out a few more injured people, again from the west side. They were shot in the field in the same way, dust rising as bullets hit the ground. At that point Prof. Ula's cousin suggested that he should film what was happening. Ula had a Japanese-made portable VCR and camera—as far as he knew, the only one in the country. He set up the camera at the window pane and stuck the microphone slightly out of the window. While he was doing this two more batches of people had been brought out and killed. The video camera filmed three more batches of killing, bringing the total number to seven rounds of killing of unarmed (or disarmed) people, according to Ula.

The later batches were being brought from the east side of the field and being killed in the same way, shot near the pile of bodies. At one point Ula saw about forty troops, 'tall and fair', line up at the north end of the field. They took no part in the killing. The ones doing the shooting were 'relatively short and dark'. About ten of these appeared from the east side of the field, bringing with them 25–26 men—Ula thought they had come to move the bodies, but

they too were shot. One bearded man kept pleading with folded hands, even after the shooting. A soldier tried to kick him down to the ground, but he remained kneeling. So he shot him again. The soldiers.lined up at the north end now marched off in an orderly fashion, while the killer soldiers checked the bodies and shot a few last times. Then they all left. Ula gives no final total of the bodies on the field.

Massacre at the faculty quarters in Building 34. At the Senior Review Group meeting at the Western White House in San Clemente, California, the following exchange took place on 31 March 1971:

Henry Kissinger: 'Did they kill Professor Razak? He was one of my students'.

David Blee (CIA): 'I think so. They killed a lot of people at the university'.

Henry Kissinger: 'They didn't dominate 400 million Indians all those years by being gentle'.[44]

Oddly, having enquired after Prof. Razzak, Kissinger seems unmoved by his reported killing, making instead a curious remark presumably about Muslim rulers of India.

Prof. Razzak lived in Building 34, the same apartment building as Prof. Guhathakurta. The three-storey building had a stairwell in the middle with a flat on either side. A German scholar who lived in one of the top floor flats had left for Bangkok on 16 March. In the other one was Prof. Maniruzzaman of the Statistics Department. Prof. Anisur Rahman (Economics) and Prof. Razzak (International Relations) were on the first floor. On the ground floor were the Guhathakurtas and the family of the late Prof. Hai (Bengali).[45]

'Nobody went to faculty quarters', said Brig. (Lt Col.) Taj to me when I enquired about the killing of professors. But somebody did, in particular to Building 34. Members of the five families that lived there are able to testify to what happened there. The CIA was wrong too; Prof. Razzak was in Building 34 that night, but he survived unhurt.

The Guhathakurtas—Jyotirmoy, Basanti and their teenage daughter Meghna—hid under the bed when the attack started on the student halls. When the firing seemed to subside, Basanti Guhathakurta peeped out of the window and saw a convoy of military vehicles including a jeep come and stop at the barricade on the crossroads. An officer pulled off the chains on their gate and the troops swarmed in on all floors of the building and started to kick on each of the two doors of every flat on each floor.

The officer broke the window pane in Meghna's room, cut the net with his bayonet and moved aside the curtain. Mrs Guhathakurta thought he spotted

their feet sticking out from under the bed. In a trice he had gone round to her garden on the side of the building. Mrs Guhathakurta gave her husband his '*panjabi*' (tunic) and said, 'Get ready, they've come to arrest you'. The officer had meantime got through the kitchen door at the back, pushed aside the maid and got into the verandah. Mrs Guhathakurta faced him. She recounted the following—in broken Urdu:[46]

The officer asked, '*Professor sahab hai?*' (Is the Professor here?) Mrs Guhathakurta said, '*Hai*'. The officer said, '*Unko le jayega* (sic)'. (We will take him)

'*Kahan le jayega, bhai?*' (Where will you take him, brother?) asked Mrs Guhathakurta, holding on to his arm as he walked along the verandah, looking at the ground and not at her. '*Le jayega* (sic)' (Will take him), he said.

Going along behind him, Mrs Guhathakurta said, 'You have got in, so why are they still breaking down the front doors?'

The officer called out, '*Hum idhar par hai, Yaqub! Darwaza mat bhango* (sic)'. (I am in here, Yaqub, don't break down the door) The kicking stopped at once.[47]

Going towards their bedroom the officer asked, '*Aur koi jawan aadmi hai?*' (Are there any other young people?) Mrs Guhathakurta said, '*Hamara ek hi ladki hai*'. (We have only one daughter) '*Theek hai, theek hai*', said the officer, '*ladki ko koi dar nahi hai*'. (It's all right, no need to fear for the daughter) In the bedroom Prof. Guhathakurta was still standing holding his '*panjabi*'. The officer gripped his left arm. Mrs Guhathakurta put the '*panjabi*' on him and said, 'He has come to arrest you'. The officer asked, '*Aap professor sahib hai?*' (You are the Professor?) Prof. Guhathakurta answered, 'Yes'. '*Aapko le jayega* (sic)' (We will take you). 'Why?' demanded Prof. Guhathakurta, but he was dragged off through the garden.

Mrs Guhathakurta ran back with his sandals, but could not see them any more. Meanwhile, a tremendous commotion started in the stairwell, where Mrs Guhathakurta found Mrs Maniruzzaman crying on the stairs while soldiers dragged down Prof. Maniruzzaman, his son, nephew and another gentleman. They had only moved in on 5 March. Mrs Guhathakurta advised the Maniruzzamans to go with the soldiers, as otherwise they might shoot, and said that her own husband had also just been taken to the cantonment. Two shots were heard outside, and Meghna put her hands to her ears.

The officer returned and tried to break into the dining room—Mrs Guhathakurta opened the lock for him. He checked all the bathrooms. While in Meghna's bathroom he asked, '*Mujibur Rahman kahan rahta hai?*' (Where

does Mujibur Rahman live?) A confused Meghna said, 'We don't know him' (referring to the political leader), whereupon the officer shouted at her and left through the garden.

There was a volley of shots in the stairwell, and Prof. Maniruzzaman and the other three were found groaning in pools of blood while the troops ran out. Somebody was asking for water. The barricade had been cleared and eleven vehicles drove away. Mrs Guhathakurta still thought her husband was in one of those vehicles. It was only after Mrs Maniruzzaman shouted out that Prof. Guhathakurta was lying outside that she discovered what had actually happened.

Prof. Guhathakurta was found lying on his back on the grassy patch near the gate. He was paralysed, but conscious and speaking. He was carried inside and moved to the Medical College hospital in the morning of 27 March. He lived for four days before dying in the hospital on 30 March. His wife and daughter had to leave his body there to seek safe shelter and never knew what happened to it. Prof. Guhathakurta's testimony—through his wife and daughter—is that the officer made him stand facing the hall and asked his name and his religion, and as soon as he answered, held a gun at his neck and shot him.

All the other Bengali accounts—Prof. Anisur Rahman, Jahanara Imam, Kaliranjan Shil—are consistent with one another regarding the events at Building 34. Prof. Anisur Rahman had put a big lock on one of the front doors and remained silent inside with his wife and daughters, giving the impression that there was no one in the flat. The Hai family had done exactly the same thing according to Jahanara Imam.[48] Prof. Rahman also heard people being dragged down the stairs from Prof. Maniruzzaman's flat, and the shooting downstairs. The boots stopped outside his door too, and someone knocked and pressed hard on the bell, but left. He also saw soldiers go to the next house where Prof. Govinda Dev lived. Early in the morning of 26 March he heard soldiers return to the upstairs flats and collect corpses from the building. On 27 March, he saw 'a corpse being carried away in a stretcher toward the medical college'—that was actually the injured Prof. Guhathakurta. Curfew was lifted that day and everyone fled from the building, with Prof. Razzak advising the others to go to the medical college for safety.

When I asked Brig. Taj whether the army had a list of targeted faculty members on 25 March night, he said there was no such list. Maj. Gen. Umar, Secretary of the National Security Council, also denied that there was any list. However, there were certainly lists of political leaders to be arrested, starting with Sheikh Mujib—commandos were in charge of arresting them. Brig. Taj

said the only named person he had sent a group to arrest was the politician Kamal Hossain, who was not found.[49]

There was another Hossain on the list of political arrests, and he was found. Lt Commander Moazzem Hossain was one of the accused in the Agartala conspiracy case in which Sheikh Mujib was also named. In separate accounts, his wife and his neighbour Abdullah Khaled say that early in the morning of 26 March a group of soldiers led by a 'Captain' came looking for him. Moazzem usually stayed at other addresses at night, but that night he was at home. All four men in the building—another neighbour, Khaled, a servant boy and Moazzem Hossain—were lined up outside while the officer asked their names. The three others were told to go back in. The neighbour, Khaled, claims that he heard the officer say 'finish him' as he ran back in, and then shots, and turned around to see Lt Commander Moazzem fall down bleeding. Mrs Hossain wrote that she looked out of the upstairs window to see her husband's body being carried off.[50]

On the recorded radio communications, the voice comes through loud and clear: '*26 Markhor ko batayen, ke Lt. Commander Moazzem ko pakarne gaye the, to usne resistance kiya, jisme woh mara gaya, Lt. Commander Moazzem mara gaya. Uski body hamare paas hai. Over*'. (Inform 'Markhor' that we went to arrest Lt Commander Moazzem, he put up resistance, in which he was killed. Lt Commander Moazzem has been killed. His body is with us.) '26' should be a code for 32 Punjab, judging by the use of the same code for the unit sent to the Rajarbag police lines. However, Brig. (Lt Col.) Taj, the CO of 32 Punjab, could not recall the attempted arrest and killing of Lt Commander Moazzem Hossain. The only 'Hossain' he remembered having tried to arrest, without success, was the barrister-politician Kamal Hossain. Only the officer reporting that Moazzem Hossain had been killed can clarify in what way he had resisted arrest that he could not be taken alive.

At the faculty quarters in Building 34 of the university, the soldiers tried to kick down the doors of all the apartments and killed all the adult males they found—not a sign of targeting on the basis of any list of names. Yet the officer who entered the Guhathakurta residence is said to have addressed him as 'Professor Sahab' and asked his daughter where 'Mujibur Rahman' lived! Meghna Guhathakurta wondered if the officer was actually looking for Prof. Anisur Rahman, who lived upstairs. Another confusion remains with regard to Prof. Maniruzzaman. If the army had a list of faculty, a person likely to be on it was apparently Prof. Maniruzzaman of the Bengali department, who was politically active. The Professor Maniruzzaman dragged down and killed along with three

of his family members belonged to the Statistics department and had only just moved in.

Perils of being a pall-bearer. At one point, the communications among the army units involved in the night's operations started discussing the matter of disposing of dead bodies. A message came through intended for all units: '26. Message from 77. *Markhor ko inform karen ke Imam ne kaha hai first light se pehle pehle jitney ye dead bodies hain itney [*unclear*]. Aur sab concerning ko bata de. Over*'. (Inform the 'Markhor' that the 'Imam' has said that before first light as many dead bodies as there are ... [unclear]. And inform all concerned.)

The communications centre asks units coded 16, 41 and 88 if they received this message. After much disturbance HQ is heard responding to '88', the unit in charge of dealing with the University: '88, yes, arrange to dispose them. You can use local labour and dispose them off away from the public places. Over'.

Meanwhile, Rabindra Mohan Das and his family had been forced out into the open when their staff quarters were set on fire. The soldiers started to beat up his elder brother, but let him go when he started speaking in Hindi. Everyone tried to get away from there, including his brother, but 31 persons were still there when the soldiers ordered fifteen of them to go with them. These men were made to collect corpses and put them in a pile on the long-jump sand-pit on the field in front of Jagannath Hall. Then they were shot. The soldiers came back and took the rest—who met with the same fate—all except Das and another boy, who were considered too young and let off after being slapped around.

Das recounted these events with a strange calm and precision. He now worked at the Provost's office himself, just as his father did then. We talked at the grounds of Jagannath Hall. He pointed out the locations of the staff quarters and the sand-pit. When Das left the area around 1pm on 26 March, the bodies were still in a pile on the sand-pit. His estimate of how many bodies were there, around twenty-five, was about the same as the number of staff taken to gather the bodies and be shot in turn.

Kaliranjan Shil, who had been hiding on the cornice of Jagannath Hall, was caught when he came back into the building in the morning thinking the soldiers had gone. Instead he found surviving young men being made to carry corpses down to the field. He was put to work too, starting with the gateman Priyanath's corpse. A small group of students, staff and sweepers were made to bring the bodies down and gather them under a tree. The soldiers smoked, and abused them for demanding 'Bangladesh'. The sweepers were pleading to be let off as they were not Bengalis, and a group of them were taken away. Shil

and a few others were taken to the apartment building in which Prof. Guhathakurta lived—he saw bodies in the stairwell, which they moved. The soldiers were also collecting all Bangladesh flags and looting valuables, according to Shil.

Shil writes that he has no count of how many bodies he carried. In the last phase he was taking the body of another gateman, Sunil, to the pile of corpses on the field and saw the soldiers shooting the sweepers they had separated earlier. The other boys who had gathered the corpses were also lined up and shot. Women of the sweepers' families were screaming from their '*bustee*' (slum) and being chased away by soldiers. Putting Sunil's body down in the pile, Shil saw Prof. Govinda Dev's body—in a '*dhoti*'—and lay down beside it. An indeterminate time later he 'awoke' to the wails of the families of the sweepers, gardeners and gatemen. Some of the men were still alive. One injured man was crawling away. The military were nowhere to be seen. Shil escaped to the '*bustee*'.[51]

I first heard that someone had secretly filmed Pakistani soldiers killing unarmed people in Dhaka University from a Bangladeshi friend in the United States. Such a film would be invaluable—and incontrovertible—evidence of what had transpired on the field in front of Jagannath Hall at daybreak on 26 March 1971. One expected such footage to be treated as national treasure, shown widely on television and made available to major research archives. I expected to be able to see the footage when I went to Bangladesh.

However, while people in Dhaka said they had seen the footage on television many years ago, even those involved in the world of film had no idea where it might be. The Liberation War Museum of Dhaka did not have it. I tried to find Professor Nurul Ula, whose film it was, and was told he and his family had emigrated and he had passed away. Eventually I saw a few seconds of the footage in a British Channel 4 programme from the 1990s on Bangladeshi-accused 'war criminals' living in Britain. It had other sound overlaid on it, and showed only one group being shot, while Prof. Ula had written that he had been able to film three such rounds.[52] The film is crucial visual material which deserves to be found in its original entirety, preserved, analysed and housed in historical archives.

How Many Casualties?

'300 killed? Anybody wounded, captured? Over'.

'88. I believe only in one thing: it's 300 killed. Over'.

'88, yes, I agree with you, that's much easier... you don't have to explain anything'.

– exchange between army officers about casualties in the University area

While fighting was still reportedly going on in the student halls in Dhaka University, a relayed message from the unit on the ground reported to the brigade commander: '77, latest from 88: that he is making progress, but there are so many buildings that he has to reduce each one in turn. He has so far suffered no casualties, but there is firing against him. He is using everything that he's got. Over'.

Brig. (Lt Col.) Taj, commanding 32 Punjab regiment and by his own description in overall charge of the units in operation on Dhaka that night, is precise about the casualty figures at the university. There were twelve dead at Iqbal Hall, he told me, including two ladies of 'dubious purpose'. At Jagannạth Hall there were thirty-two dead, all men.

Brig. Taj's figures make a total of 44 dead from the two main halls targeted. This is higher than the estimated number of bodies seen piled on the field by Rabindra Mohan Das, but not too far off under the circumstances. Adding the twenty-nine staff members that Das reports being killed after being made to pile the corpses, the total comes to seventy-three. The Provost of Rokeya Hall, Akhtar Imam, has named seven staff members of the hall (gatemen, bearers, gardeners, and a liftman) as having been killed by the Pakistan army on the night of 25–26 March. In a departure from the other accounts, she writes that wives, children, friends and relatives of such staff were killed in their quarters, bringing the total to forty-five dead according to Rokeya Hall records.[53]

The real challenge to Brig. Taj's figure comes from his own colleague, Lt Col. Basharat, the CO of 18 Punjab, whose regiment was responsible for the University. At one point in the recorded communications during the operations, apparently early in the morning, the brigade commander enquired about the casualties in the University:

(*Officer A*): '...What do you think would be the approximate number of casualties of the University? Just give me an approximate number, in your view. What will be the number killed, or wounded, or captured? Just give me a rough figure. Over'.

(*Officer B*): '88. ... approximately 300. Over'.

(*Officer A*): 'Well done. 300 killed? Anybody wounded, captured? Over'.

(*Officer B*): '88. I believe only in one thing: it's 300 killed. Over'.

(*Officer A*): '88, yes, I agree with you, that's much easier, you know, nothing asked, nothing done, you don't have to explain anything. Well, once again, well done...'[54]

From this exchange it appears that the brigade commander was expecting some of the rebels at the University to be wounded or captured—in other words, that he had not ordered his subordinates to kill everyone they encountered. That decision appears to have been taken by the commanding officer on the ground. However, the brigade commander condoned the decision and assured the regiment commander that he had nothing to explain. Ironically, 300 is also the casualty figure cited by Prof. Meghna Guhathakurta, daughter of Prof. Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta who was killed in cold blood that night—one of the scalps of the commanding officer who did not believe in taking prisoners.[55]

At 'Shirishtola' in Dhaka University there is a memorial to all those belonging to the university who lost their lives during 1971. The total, including all faculty, students and staff killed during the whole of the year, is 149. Some of the faculty and students named were killed at other times in other places, so the number of those who were killed on the night of 25–26 March at the university would be lower than 149 by the university's own count. Interestingly, the number of staff killed is twenty-nine, exactly the number cited by Rabindra Mohan Das.

How does one reconcile the range of 44 to 300 dead estimated by the two battalion commanders who should know best? Eye-witness accounts by the Bengalis and the university's own memorial do not add up to anywhere near 300. Is it the unaccounted-for 'outsiders' who had come to take military training who make up the rest of the deaths? Or is it that figures of the dead can be 'bloated' as much by the attackers as by the attacked?

What happened to the dead bodies? 'There are no bodies buried in fields', Brig. (Lt Col.) Taj said to me with a little smile, anticipating my question, 'All dead bodies were sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital'.

Taj was not at the university as night cleared into dawn. During the night he had to go personally to the Rajarbag police lines, he told me, as it was taking a long time to 'secure' those. Arriving there, he lobbed in a couple of rockets—shells that tended to make a lot of noise, he said, and had the desired psychological effect on the enemy, while breaking down buildings. An ammunition dump caught fire. Rajarbag was not 'secured' till 6 am.[56] However, it seems his battalion may have been pressed into service at the university area later.

A specific time is mentioned in a message in the radio communication, when the unit coded '88', at the University, is asked how much longer its current operation will take:

'88 for 77. Now it is quarter to seven. I'll move from this place at eight. I'll be requiring approximately an hour to collect the bodies and dispose them off. Over'.

Brigade HQ: '88. Roger. You can collect them in one place and call sign 26 may be told about them. Their eventual disposal, the Imam said, may be done later. For the present they may be counted in separate categories of police or civilian and call sign 26 can keep a general eye on them while you move down to your area. Over'.

'... 88. Roger. For the time being we are collecting that, we'll dump them at one place and then we'll call 26. Thank you so much. Anything else? Over'.

['26' is the code reference to 32 Punjab regiment, commanded by Lt. Col. (Brig.) Taj.]

Before fleeing his apartment building around one o'clock in the afternoon on 26 March, Prof. Ula saw a large bulldozer digging the earth on the games field. Capt. Sarwar also recalled seeing 'dozers' coming along while he was at the demolition of the Shahid Minar—he didn't associate anything sinister with them. He also thought there might have been public health reasons for burying some bodies where they lay. When the curfew was lifted on 27 March, like many others Dr Abul Kalam of Kolabagan ventured out. He told me that on the field by Jagannath Hall he saw limbs sticking out of the earth.[57]

When I first heard about a 'mass grave' in the field outside Jagannath Hall I expected that it had been dug up as soon as Bangladesh became independent and the bodies counted, identified and taken for proper funerals by the families of the dead, with a memorial with the relevant information erected on the site. I found that no such thing had happened. There is a memorial, but at the side of the field. Meghna Guhathakurta thought that some remains had been dug up and removed there, while others believed that the bodies were still under the field. Not even the most ardent *Muktijuddha* (liberation war) enthusiasts were able to offer any explanation as to why no scientific exhumation was carried out after the end of the war, or why the families of those allegedly buried there would not demand retrieval of the bodies of their loved ones. As an excuse many Bangladeshis spoke of the political turmoil and return to (home-grown) military rule, but Sheikh Mujib was in power till August 1975 and there was much international sympathy and assistance on offer in the early years. Even the military ruler who came to power in 1975, Zia-ur Rahman, had rebelled and fought for Bangladesh's independence in 1971.

The failure to carry out a scientific exhumation at such a specific site, in the capital city, of such a well-publicised incident has damaged Bangladesh's claims of massacre and mass burial at the University. It is possible that a dig would reveal fewer bodies than the numbers claimed by Bangladeshis. It is also pos-

sible that identification might reveal that some of the dead were not students of the university. That would dent parts of the nationalist mythology, but be truer to history. With international assistance a scientific probe is still possible, if Bangladeshis have the will.

Dissent and dissonance. After the action of the night was largely over, Lt Col. (Brig.) Taj went over to the Hotel Intercontinental, where top political leaders and the foreign media were staying. The journalists declared that they had heard a 'lot of firing' and wanted to go around and see the situation in the city for themselves. Lt Col. Taj replied that it may have sounded to non-military people like a lot of shooting, but there wasn't really that much fire-power used by military standards. He said he was willing to take the media around, but would have to ask permission from higher authorities. According to Taj, he did ask permission and is not sure what happened, for shortly afterwards Brig. A.R. Siddiqi, the chief public relations officer, was sent to the hotel and the foreign media representatives were deported.[58]

American diplomacy in Pakistan was riven with discord after the military action. The Consul-General in Dhaka, Archer Blood, famously sent a dissenting cable to Washington on 6 April, in which he backed twenty US foreign service officers serving in Dhaka in their dissent from the official US policy of non-intervention in the crisis in East Pakistan. A furious Secretary of State William Rogers complained to Kissinger about 'that goddam message from our people in Dacca'.[59] Kissinger agreed. President Nixon was clear about his judgment on US policy in the matter: 'The main thing to do is to keep cool and not do anything. There's nothing in it for us either way'.[60] After the dissenting cable Blood was transferred from Dhaka.

It is hard to quarrel with President Nixon's judgment on US non-intervention from the material point of view. It was a view shared by his key advisers throughout the deteriorating situation in March, with Alexis Johnson of the State Department giving his opinion that 'There is a case to be made for massive inaction', and the CIA director Richard Helms declaring that the US should not get involved in a 'family fight' and that his 'visceral reaction is to keep our distance as long as we can'.[61] Besides, not only the White House but the US embassy in Islamabad also 'doubted the balance and accuracy' of Consul-General Blood's reporting from Dhaka.[62] Blood's later autobiography shows that many of his reports were indeed inaccurate, based as they were on uncorroborated information obtained second-hand, yet they need not diminish the force of his moral argument against the military action or the US policy of non-intervention. Even Kissinger conceded he had a point.[63]

The top levels of the Pakistan army were similarly divided. On 4 April Lt Gen. A.A.K. Niazi arrived in East Pakistan and on 10 April he took over the operational command of the Eastern Command from General Tikka Khan, who became Governor and Martial Law Administrator. In his book and in discussions with me, Gen. Niazi compared the action taken in Dhaka on 25–26 March to the Jallianwalabagh massacre of civilians by the British at Amritsar in the Punjab in 1919. As he explained to me, his criticism was not that military action did not need to be taken, but that it should have been conducted differently. His view was that General Tikka deviated from the given mission of disarming Bengali personnel and arresting secessionist leaders, and caused needless bloodshed among civilians. For example, instead of a wholesale attack, the 'rebels' so-called strong points' might have been smoked out by surrounding them and cutting off electricity, water and supplies. Gen. Niazi reckoned they would have surrendered in a couple of days.[64]

The discord permeated right down to the soldiers on the ground. Nazrul Islam and a visiting friend spent the night of 25–26 March cowering in his Art College hostel room, while a battle raged next door at the East Pakistan Rifles (EPR) camp. The next morning they were joined by another student, Shahnawaz, known for his sense of humour. When asked what was going on outside, Shahnawaz replied, '*Joy Bangla, thyala shamla!*' (Joy Bangla, now face the music!) Before they could flee, soldiers arrived and went up to the roof of their building from where they threw a powder-like substance on to the '*bustee*' (slum) below and then fired, causing the '*bustee*' to catch fire. When people ran out of the blazing huts, the soldiers shot at them. While coming downstairs, they banged on the doors. Finding the three boys, they lined them up, shot all three and looked for valuables to loot before leaving. Islam lay there, bleeding, waiting to die.

Later in the day another group of soldiers came. Islam kept his eyes closed. To his astonishment, one of these soldiers said (in Urdu), 'Oh no, who shot these young people, and why? *Khuda to hai* (There is God, after all), one day there will be judgment'. They examined the three, and finding Islam still alive, one said to another, '*Pani do—bach jayega*'. (Give him water, he will live) They gave him water, stroking him and saying, '*Beta zinda raho, beta zinda raho*'. (Stay alive, son, stay alive)[65]

4

UNCIVIL WAR

MOBS, MUTINIES AND MADNESS

'Our government has failed to denounce atrocities.... we have chosen not to intervene, even morally, on the grounds that the Awami conflict, in which unfortunately the overworked term genocide is applicable, is purely internal matter of a sovereign state. Private Americans have expressed disgust. We, as professional public servants express our dissent with current policy...'

– Dissenting cable from twenty US foreign service officers serving in Dhaka, supported by Consul-General Archer Blood, 6 April 1971

William Rogers: *'They talk about condemning atrocities. There are pictures of the East Pakistanis murdering people'.*
Henry Kissinger: *'Yes. There was one of an East Pakistani holding a head. Do you remember when they said there were 1000 bodies and they had the graves and then we couldn't find 20?'*

– Telephone conversation between Secretary of State William Rogers and President's Assistant for National Security Affairs Henry Kissinger, 6 April 1971[1]

Sitting in his prison cell in Calcutta, having been questioned over and over again but also given medical treatment for his injuries, Lt Syed Ataullah Shah of the Pakistan army was at last able to look through the magazines he had been given by the Indians. He thought it was *Time* or *Newsweek* in which he

saw the photo—Bengalis holding up the severed head of a West Pakistani. Lt Ataullah had a particular reason to be shocked by it—he knew the man whose head it was. Worse, he had been with him just before this happened.

Ataullah was one of only 11 out of about 155 officers and men of the 27 Baloch regiment to survive attack and slaughter by the far more numerous Bengali rebels in Kushtia. The *Newsweek* issue dated 12 April 1971 carries a photograph of a group of people smiling as they hold up a severed head. The caption reads: 'Bengali rebels displaying severed head of federal soldier: "They must die"'. But Lt Ataullah told me that the beheaded man whose photo he saw while a prisoner in India was not a soldier—it was Waqar Naseem Mian, a West Pakistani civil servant posted to Kushtia, who had refused to move out with the retreating army unit, as he never thought he would be harmed by his countrymen among whom he lived and worked.[2]

The State Department responded by cable on 7 April to the 6 April 'dissenting cable' from Dhaka. The message was drafted by Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Joseph Sisco and approved by Secretary of State Rogers. 'In addressing the complaint that the United States had failed to denounce the actions taken by Pakistan's army in East Pakistan, Sisco noted that there were conflicting reports about atrocities'.[3] While Kissinger in his memoirs highlighted the secret diplomacy then going on with China with Pakistan's help as the main reason why the US did not react publicly against the military action in East Pakistan, there was also the view, as expressed by Secretary Rogers, that non-reaction was a 'good choice' given the conflicting reports about the army action and reports of atrocities by the Bengali nationalist side.

Evidence from several incidents during the days immediately following the launch of military action bears out the confusion and contradictions of this period and is supportive of the more cautious policy adopted by the Nixon administration in expressing concern for the 'loss of life, damage and hardship suffered by the people of Pakistan', while not rushing headlong into moralising condemnation of one side only.[4] It also illustrates how a nation created a mere two decades before as the answer to the vulnerabilities of South Asian Muslims had split down the middle, not only between East and West, but within the Eastern province along the lines of religious beliefs, ethnic identities and political ideologies, down to the level of the family, pitting—sometimes literally—brother against brother.

This chapter illustrates through ten cases the bitter feud at its many levels in the days following the start of the military action, in Shankharipara (a

Hindu area in old Dhaka), Jinjira, Joydevpur, Khulna, Mymensingh, Santahar, Tangail, Chittagong, Kushtia and Comilla. It presents the memories of participants, eye-witnesses and survivors of the conflict and brings together testimony of those present from both sides of the conflict. The collective evidence runs counter to all the existing 'national' narratives.

Shankharipara: Army Attack on a Hindu Area in Dhaka

Shankharipara is a narrow lane in old Dhaka, traditionally home to the Hindu '*shankha*' (conchshell) business. The shop-fronts face the lane and the residents live in the terraced housing on both sides of the road. The '*shankha*' business is dwindling, and most of the shops now sell other things. '*Shankher koraat*', the instrument for cutting the conchshell, has idiomatic usage in the Bengali language—it cuts both ways.

(i) *Testimony of Amiya Kumar Sur:*

Amiya Kumar Sur is still in the '*shankha*' business. Images of Hindu gods hang high on the walls of his shop where he sits cross-legged on a '*taktaposh*' (low four-legged wooden divan), surrounded by the '*shankha*' bracelets worn traditionally by married Hindu women. An almost life-sized clay image of a manifestation of the Mother Goddess is visible in the little room at the back. Amiya*babu* told me that in the late 1930s Subhas Chandra Bose had visited the area and walked through the lane in a procession to the accompaniment of '*shankhadhwani*'—ceremonial blowing of the conchshell. Two of Amiya*babu's* sons were working in other professions, but he intended to keep his youngest son in the '*shankha*' business—it was 'in his blood', he said.[5]

In 1971 Amiya Kumar Sur was about thirty years old. He recalled it in his soft-spoken style with a little wry smile, as the year of his life's greatest sorrow and joy. On 26 March, in the daytime, the army came to Shankharipara.[6] Soldiers were on the roofs. One man, Nilkanta Datta of Number 40, was running from one room to the other in his house and had to cross an open space: a soldier shot him from the roof. Amiya Sur and his family remained inside their home and survived unharmed.

In his book that followed his report in the *Sunday Times* condemning the military crackdown in East Pakistan, Anthony Mascarenhas wrote, 'In Shankaripatti an estimated 8000 men, women and children were killed when the army, having blocked both ends of the winding street, hunted them down house by house'.[7] This is not an eye-witness account, as Mascarenhas was not

there, and he does not cite any source for this information—which in this case is totally wrong in all aspects.

Mascarenhas' reports, like many foreign press reports in 1971, are a mixture of reliable and unreliable information, depending on whether the reporter is faithfully reporting what he has actually seen or is merely writing an uncorroborated version of what someone else has told him. Mascarenhas' report on 13 June in the *Sunday Times* included eye-witness accounts of what he saw of the army operation in Comilla in April, for example. It is a chilling account, in which he names officers on 'kill and burn' missions. Yet other parts of the same report, and his book, contain much unquestioned 'hearsay'. What actually happened in Shankharipara on 26 March, according to its residents and survivors, was terrifying, but an entirely different incident.

According to the survivors of Shankharipara, the army did not go house to house. They entered only one house, Number 52. No one could tell me exactly why that house was targeted—perhaps because it was larger than other houses and looked more prosperous. Later Amiya Sur saw the bodies there himself—fourteen or sixteen of them on the '*aangina*' (courtyard)—including one infant whom his father had been carrying. All the other residents who remained inside their homes survived. But they decided to take no further risk and started to leave Shankharipara. Amiya Sur left within a couple of days, on a Sunday—so it would have been 28 March when he left. By then everyone else had left too and Shankharipara was empty. The dozen or more bodies were abandoned.

The Surs returned after Bangladesh became independent. They found the buildings empty and damaged. Apparently 'Biharis' had occupied them in their absence. They got help from the government of independent Bangladesh—not much and not enough, Amiya Sur said, but he was stoical about it.

(ii) *Testimony of Amar Sur:*

Two of the bodies that Amiya Sur had seen in house number 52 were those of Chandhan Sur and his infant son Buddhadev. I heard their story from Chandhan Sur's eldest son, Amar. Amar's shop is at Number 47, while their home is Number 51. Amar Sur is an impressive personality—good-looking, articulate, with a sense of drama and tragedy, a good raconteur. Amar Sur is also bitter—as much about what happened to his family in independent Bangladesh as about what they suffered at the hands of the Pakistan army.[8]

In 1971 Amar Sur was a teenaged tearaway, living with his parents, four brothers and three sisters. On 25 March night there was some '*golaguli*' (shoot-

ing) outside the lane. Amiya Sur also said the police post outside the lane was apparently attacked that night. However, the army actually arrived in Shankharipara on 26 March afternoon. Soldiers appeared on the roofs. Amar's father told him to run down the passage along the back of the houses, climbing over the walls. Amar ran, carrying one of his sisters who was 'paralysed'. His father carried the youngest brother. Everyone ran for their lives, there was chaos. Amar said that the Pakistani army did nothing to women, many of whom remained indoors; they were killing adult men.

When Amar returned after the army had gone, he found the dead bodies of his father and baby brother. There were fourteen or fifteen persons killed, all inside house Number 52. Amar said he found his father's body leaning against an '*alna*' (clothes rack), still standing. The infant was lying on the floor. People took the bodies out and laid them out on the '*aangina*'.

That is when someone seems to have taken a photograph of the bodies of Chandhan Sur and his infant son. Amar did not know who took the photo. Someone told him that it was displayed in a Calcutta studio when they were refugees in India—the owner of the studio gave him the print.[9] The photo was published later in newspapers and books.[10]

According to Amar Sur, house Number 52 was the property of the Kali temple of the lane. It was a bigger house than the others. Of the men killed there, Amar's father Chandhan and another man, 'Chitta-da',[11] who lived in Number 52, were active in politics, the rest were non-political.

There was no question of a funeral. Everyone ran away. Amar and his family took shelter in a place a short distance away across the river. But some time later, the army arrived there as well.[12] Again people ran for their lives. Amar carried the same sister, who could not walk. His mother carried the second youngest brother. They got separated in the chaos. One sister was shot and fell down. They all kept running, leaving anyone who was hit. A bullet hit on the head the sister he was carrying. She died. He met his mother after many days and told her his sister had been shot dead. His mother told him she had given his brother to an unknown person while fleeing, and lost him.

His mother kept saying that his sister who had been shot and fallen down must be alive, so Amar went back in search of her. He found that someone had taken her to a hospital. The bullet was still lodged inside her, the doctor wanted money to perform the operation. He went with the doctor to his bank, took out the money, paid the doctor, and went back to the rest of the family. A Muslim acquaintance advised him to change the first letter of his name from A to U—'Umar', a Muslim name.

The family then attempted escape to India by boat. The '*dalal*' (broker) wanted Rs. 100 per head. They paid, and went on the boat. But after a while the military came along the river in gunboats and everyone fled again. Amar did make it to India eventually. Barrackpore and Bowbazar in Calcutta have a large '*shankhari*' community. Amar sold ribbons as a hawker on the streets of Calcutta; he found it demeaning.

After Bangladesh's independence they found that the injured sister had been operated on and the doctor had taken her to a relative's place. The story of the missing brother came out in the papers. A Muslim gentleman contacted them and asked them to come and see if the child he had been given during the war was his brother. He was. It turned out that the person in whose arms his mother had thrust the baby while runningwas a poor man with many children. He had given the child to a richer person who was childless. This gentleman had been raising the child as his own. He now gave the child back to his real family, but asked to still raise him. They made an arrangement bywhich the child divided his time between the two families. This brother later went to India. According to Amar, he said he could not bear to stay in Bangladesh any more.

Amar Sur is very bitter. He says independent Bangladesh did not help them even though they are '*shahider santan*' (children of a martyr). He is particularly upset that their house was recorded as 'vested property' and that there was no government support in response to his appeals, even under the Awami League, support for whom had made this Hindu area a target in 1971.

Jinjira: Army Operation with Civilian Casualties

As the operations in Dhaka University and elsewhere came to a close in the early morning of 26 March, other potential trouble spots were discussed over the communications network among involved army units:[13]

(*Brigade Major Jafar Khan, HQ*): 'Hallo 88. There is a location south of the river called Jinjira—I spell 'Juliet', 'India', 'Juliet', 'India', 'Romeo', 'Alpha'—Jinjira. This is just south of the river, across from your area. It was reported earlier that arms and ammunition were being stored here. Romeo or Sierra unit may have some information after their patrolling. You might like to keep an eye on this. Over'.

(*Lt. Col. Basharat Sultan, CO 18 Punjab*): 'I'm surely going to deal with that. Over'.

After the action in Dhaka was over, the 18 Punjab units were told to go and 'clear' Jinjira, a place across the river where the army was receiving fire, including mortar fire. So one night, Lt Muhammad Ali Shah found himself trying to get across the river with two platoons in whatever floating device he could

requisition, including '*noukas*' (country boats), in order to form a 'blocking position' on the eastern side of the island before one of the other companies started the assault at daybreak.[14] The expectation was that when the armed rebels ran, they would run eastwards.

What they had not expected, however, was that when the firing started, the civilians started to run as well. Waves of people came towards Lt Shah, almost nobody was armed. Unsure of the best course of action, the young officer finally fired over the heads of the surging crowd. But then they started to run in the opposite direction, towards the advancing assault.

Similar nightmares of fighting insurgencies in the midst of a civilian population were also evident in 'sweep and search' operations, where split-second decisions could determine life or death for the soldier, as much as for the rebel or a civilian caught in-between. On one occasion during a 'sweep and search' Lt Shah's wireless operator was shot and killed right behind him by a sniper's bullet. Anything that moved in the probable location of the sniper could be either an armed rebel or an unarmed bystander. If he shot, he might hit an unarmed person; if he didn't, he might get shot himself; and he had about half a second to decide.

Lots of weapons were recovered from Jinjira that day according to him, including mortars, but there was no resistance.

Joydevpur and Gazipur: Killing of Non-Bengali Personnel and their Families by Rebel Bengali Army Personnel

On 25–26 March, Brig. Karimullah of the Ordnance Factory in Gazipur was stuck in Dhaka, where he was pleading with Gen. Tikka Khan for at least a company of West Pakistani troops to ensure the safety of the factory and the evacuation of West Pakistani and other non-Bengali families to Dhaka.[15] On 26 March, while military action was on in Dhaka, he contacted Gazipur by wireless to find that all was calm at the factory and a platoon from 2 East Bengal Regiment (2 EBR) under Maj. Asjad Latif, a West Pakistani officer whom he knew well, had already arrived there.

On 27–28 March Brig. Karimullah received messages from the new Bengali CO of 2 EBR, Lt Col. Raquib, and others at Gazipur, asking him to return to the factory, but he was advised not to go without West Pakistani troops and none were available. In the early hours of 29 March the wireless at POF Gazipur went off the air and 2 EBR at Joydevpur could not be contacted either. Given his experience during the previous several weeks, Brig. Karimullah feared the worst for his West Pakistani and non-Bengali personnel in Gazipur.

Shortly thereafter Brig. Jehanzeb Arbab confirmed that 2 EBR at Joydevpur had mutinied.

Brig. Karimullah now accompanied Brig. Arbab, other officers and men of 8 Baluch as they proceeded to Joydevpur, taking with them the Bengali Brig. Majumdar, Commandant of the EPRC at Chittagong, so that he could speak in Bengali over loudspeakers to the rebels, asking them to give themselves up. According to the Bengali 2IC of 2 EBR, Maj. Safiullah, Majumdar had earlier visited Joydevpur on 25 March to tell the troops that as soldiers they were bound to obey the orders of the government.[16] Brig. Karimullah's log gives a vivid picture of what they found at Joydevpur and Gazipur on 29 March.

At the Joydevpur '*Rajbari*', where 2 EBR was stationed, the entire battalion was found to have gone, taking all their weapons and ammunition. The Bengali CO Lt Col. Raquib was there in civilian clothes, along with a captain. They professed ignorance of how and when the whole battalion had disappeared. Brig. Karimullah records, 'The Senior JCO rushed to the JCOs' Lines to look for his family. Soon there were heart-rending cries from the quarters. All the members of the JCO's family (eight in all) have been brutally butchered. Rajbadi was then searched. All W. Pak Offrs and personnel have been murdered brutally. Ten more bodies were recovered and others were missing though their blood-stained clothes were found'.

Brig. Majumdar, the most senior Bengali officer in the Pakistan army at the time, has published his reminiscences where he has written at length about his attempts to get Sheikh Mujib to agree to a 'first-strike' by the Bengalis in the army while political negotiations were still going on. He has also written that he was tortured while a prisoner in West Pakistan later in the year. In his account Majumdar does not mention his visits to Joydevpur either on 25 March or on 29 March.[17]

Lt Col. Masud-ul Hossain Khan, the Bengali CO of 2 EBR who was removed to Dhaka on 23 March, has also published an account detailing steps he took in favour of the 'Bangladesh' movement and his subsequent imprisonment and torture in West Pakistan. Lt Col. Masud stated that during the night of 25–26 March he rang up Maj. K.M. Safiullah, the 2IC of 2 EBR, from Dhaka and advised him to leave Joydevpur. He claimed that Maj. Safiullah made off with the entire battalion and all their weapons and ammunition in Joydevpur after receiving his phone-call.[18]

Maj. (later Maj. Gen.) Safiullah acknowledges the phone call in his own account, but claims that he had been planning to rebel for quite some time and had placed his men in a state of readiness—to rebel—from early March. Later,

'on 27 March as Commanding Officer I went to Joydevpur, Ghazipur and Rajendrapur to supervise 2 East Bengal regiment in different places and apprised them of our plan to leave each place and re-assemble in Mymensingh. According to plan on 28 March everyone left his post and reached Mymensingh on 29 March'.[19]

In his Bengali article Safiullah is silent about what happened to the West Pakistani personnel and their families when he left Joydevpur 'according to plan'. In his book in English he writes that he left early, leaving Major Moin-ul Hussain to coordinate the move of the rest of the battalion that night. When the others turned up in Muktagachha, he was 'sorry' to learn that a West Pakistani officer, Captain Riaz, had been killed in 'crossfire' during a 'commotion'. He says nothing about how the other West Pakistani personnel and their families ended up dead.[20]

Brig. Karimullah meanwhile proceeded to Gazipur with one company under Capt. Niazi, where they had to engage in battle with the armed Bengali rebels who had taken over the factory. After recapturing the factory, they found that all the Bengali personnel except four had fled (a few died in the battle). The remaining Bengalis and the families of those who had fled started to wail in fear of being killed and had to be reassured that nothing was going to happen to them. What the Bengali rebels had been doing, however, was quite different, according to the surviving West Pakistanis and non-Bengalis there.

According to them, when the Bengali officers and workers rebelled, they took Maj. Asjad Latif to the magazine area and shot him. They also shot the wireless operator, Naik Muhammad Sharif. They took away weapons, ammunition and vehicles, and dug trenches for defence. Then they went block by block, trying to kill the all West Pakistani and non-Bengali personnel and their families. One of the West Pakistanis had a rifle with which he had managed to keep them engaged for a while, and once the rebels ran off when planes flew overhead, before returning to continue killing. They had managed to kill five people including a woman and a child before Brig. Karimullah appeared on the scene with the company from 8 Baluch.

Maj. Asjad's body was found in the magazine area. He had been hit with three bursts, on his neck, stomach and left arm—'His body was a mess and except for the face, the rest was completely mutilated'. Brig. Karimullah sent Maj. Asjad's body for burial in Dhaka. All the others were buried in the factory grounds.[21]

About Gazipur the rebel Bengali 2IC Maj. Safiullah writes that as the company tried to escape, Major Asjad Latif 'tried to stop them. Our troops had to

eliminate him'. It is not clear how Maj. Latif single-handedly tried to stop the company, or why he could not just have been locked up. Safiullah admits that the West Pakistani company commander with his battalion's company stationed at Tangail, who had been disarmed, was also killed by the Bengalis.[22]

Safiullah's accounts make another Bengali officer responsible on site when the West Pakistani personnel and their families were killed at Joydevpur. However, as the leader of the defection of 2 EBR, it would be interesting to obtain Maj. Gen. Safiullah's views as to why liberating Bangladesh led to the murder of disarmed West Pakistani officers, personnel and their families in Joydevpur, Gazipur and Tangail. Major Khaled Musharraf had also rebelled, but handed West Pakistani officers in his unit over to Indian authorities instead.

Khulna: Massacre of Biharis by Bengalis in the Jute Mills

Rustam Ali Sikdar, Peon Supervisor at the Crescent Jute Mill employed on a 'sports quota', had been an Awami League activist since 1953.[23] He claimed he had some military training, trained others, and had organised a '*bahini*' (force) of about 400 in 1969. They organised parades from the first week of March 1971. They put up a barricade at the gates of the mill, so that the army would not be able to get in; nor could any of the workers, Bengali or Bihari, get out. They were in touch with the Bengali police and EPR (East Pakistan Rifles) of the area, but had only five firearms from the mill security guards.

Initially they had an agreement with the Bihari workers to keep the peace between Bengalis and Biharis, but a few of the Biharis went out one night saying they were getting some *paan* (betel leaves). Sikdar and other Bengalis thought this must be a ruse (though they could offer no concrete reason why they should suspect this).

Abdur Rab Sardar was the head of the spinning department and also had some experience of previous conflicts between the Awami League (Bengalis) and the Muslim League (Biharis).[24] In 1971 the Bengali police of Daulatpur *thana* (police station) escaped with their arms. Similar stories were heard from other *thanas* too. The 'peace committee' in the mill was made up of five members of each community, Bengali and Bihari, who would patrol the mill with *lathis* (sticks). According to Sardar, the manager, Rahamatullah, and most of the mill officers were Ismailis and they tended to be fair, trying to keep a balance among the different communities.[25] '*Golaguli*' (shooting) started outside the mill from around the night of 24 March, and the next day the army started to patrol the area. They could not enter the mill as its gates were barricaded with an iron beam.

Two Bengali police officers who had escaped with their weapons came along the river at the back of the mill and took up position on top of a water tank. A similar thing happened in the People's Jute Mill. On 27 March the Biharis started beating drums at their quarters. They had hand-held bombs and so did the Bengalis. The Bengalis numbered around 200, according to Sardar. The Biharis were many more, but when the two Bengali police officers and the few others with the guns started to shoot at them, some of the Biharis were hit and the others panicked. The Bengali mob then picked up anything they could, such as *das* (sickles), and fell upon the Biharis, killing everyone they could find—men, women and children. Their bodies were dumped in the river. Sardar thought the same thing happened at the other jute mills. After moving the bodies he left in a boat the same night, going first to Barisal and then to India, where he received weapons training.

I asked Sardar how many Bihari men, women and children had been killed that day—dozens? Hundreds? A thousand? 'Oh yes', he said, agreeing readily to 'a thousand', and then lowered his voice and indicated that actually the number killed was much greater. A handful of the attacking Bengalis also died.

In New Colony in Khalispur, outside Khulna, Bihari residents and survivors of the mill massacre squeezed into the small club room to tell me of their experiences of 1971. While two or three of them did most of the talking, others nodded, or added their contribution from time to time.[26] Everyone agreed that the worst massacre was at Crescent Jute Mill, followed by one at People's Jute Mill. After the general strike started in early March, a few Biharis had been killed if seized in the streets, but on 28 March within the mill compound it was massacre. Sabek said he and some of his friends had gone out of the compound to have tea. When the trouble started, they could neither get back in nor bring anyone out. Men, women and children were shot, knifed—killed in any way possible. The bodies were thrown into the river. According to the Biharis, the Bengalis erected a '*phanshikaath*' (gallows) in which they executed Biharis—this was stated matter-of-factly, and the whole roomful of people nodded gravely.[27] When the army arrived the survivors gave the details of the killings to the Pakistan government. As for how many had been killed, their answer was '*lakhon*' (lakhs). As the Bengalis admit to killing thousands, a reasonable estimate would be that several thousand Biharis—men, women and children—were killed by Bengalis in that single incident.

On 7 March, as Sheikh Mujib made his historic speech in Dhaka stopping just short of declaring independence, Maj. Samin Jan Babar of 22 Frontier Force (FF) was in the Khulna Circuit House, opposite the federal minister

Sabur Khan's house.[28] He had been posted in East Pakistan, based in Jessore Cantonment, since mid-1970. The troubles that were brewing erupted after 1 March. Thereafter it was 'Mujib's rule' in East Pakistan. The army was told to stay in the cantonment and not react to anything. There was already sporadic but uncoordinated fire in Khulna from the rebel side during the night of 24 March. On 25 March Maj. Babar was told he could venture out to control the town. The unit sent to the radio station got ambushed and Babar had to go with reinforcements. He lost a few men, but said that the rebels lost more and the rest ran away.

After the week or so it took to control Khulna, Maj. Babar went out to the jute mill areas by boat along the river. His boat hit dead bodies—countless decomposed, bloated corpses clogging up the waterway. Even a tough soldier like Babar threw up at the grotesque sight. Inside the mills there were three slaughter-houses. A gallows-type structure had been erected—like a guillotine. There were choppers, an instrument called '*panja*', shaped like the five fingers, and various other contrived torture instruments. The floor was covered in blood. Later Maj. Babar took the Army Chief Hamid and the Eastern Commander Niazi around the slaughter-houses. He asked them why reports of these atrocities were not in the press, and was told that the government did not want to risk a 'backlash' against Bengalis.

After Khulna was under control Maj. Babar went on operational roles, commanding a company at Benapole and remaining in war-fighting in the field until he and the undefeated units of 107 Brigade under Brig. Muhammad Hayat, holding their positions around Khulna, were told that the surrender had already taken place the day before in Dhaka and they should stop fighting.

I asked the Biharis in New Colony, Khalispur, if they had taken revenge on the Bengalis later in the year. They said, 'How could we, we are surrounded on all sides by them', but their eyes and manner betrayed discomfort. Col. (Maj.) Babar said he had heard about Bihari vengeance, but being out in the field, had no personal knowledge of any. A Bengali manager who worked in Platinum Jute Mill showed me the location in the factory where, he said, Haroon, a Bengali 'line-sardar', had been picked up by a 'death squad' of Bihari workers and marched off outside. The manager followed them to the point where they turned a corner, beyond which was the boiler. He had not seen what happened next, but he and all the Bengalis at the mill believed Haroon had ended up inside the boiler. A striking feature of this story was that according to the manager himself, Bengalis far outnumbered the Bihari 'death squad' in the mill.

Had they resisted, one of them could not have been taken away by a small group of Biharis. But the shed full of Bengalis had sat and watched, not one of them raised a finger to help the hapless Haroon.

Mymensingh: Rebellion and Killing of West Pakistanis at the 'Cantonment'

The 'List of Major Atrocities' in the Pakistan government's *White Paper on the Crisis in East Pakistan* published in August 1971 makes for grisly reading. One of the entries states that on 27 March at 'Mymensingh Cantonment', 'EBR/EPR revolted and killed their West Pakistani colleagues, including Officers and men resting for the night in their residential quarters and barracks'. The White Paper also mentions an attack on the District Jail and the killing of male residents of Shankipara and nine other 'colonies'. Women were allegedly collected in a mosque and a school and rescued later by the Army when it 'secured' the town on 21 April.[29]

Several Pakistani officers recalled hearing about killings in Mymensingh, but when I enquired about this reported incident at the Liberation War Museum in Dhaka I was told initially that there had been no cantonment in Mymensingh. However, the incident in Mymensingh 'cantonment'—a loose reference to the East Pakistan Rifles and East Bengal regiment centre there—turned out to be common knowledge in Mymensingh town. Muhammad Abdul Haq, an elderly gentleman in Mymensingh town, pointed out the location of the 'cantonment'—the old one had been there since British times, a new one was built later. He also confirmed that Pakistani officers were killed there in 1971.

Sheikh Sultan Ahmed, another resident, was effusive in describing how he had been among the crowd surrounding the cantonment, shouting slogans in support of the Bengalis inside battling it out with their West Pakistani colleagues. But he had his moments of contrition as he recalled the events that unfolded. According to Ahmed fighting broke out between the Bengalis and the West Pakistanis in the cantonment after news of the crackdown in Dhaka reached Mymensingh. Thousands of locals gathered outside the cantonment to side with the Bengalis. None of the civilians was hurt. The fight inside went on for quite a while—the West Pakistanis resisted for as long as they could. He estimated that about '100 Pakistani officers' were killed there—there were unlikely to have been that many 'officers' there, but it is an indication of the significant scale of the incident and casualties.

Ahmed claimed to have seen bodies in the cantonment after it was all over, as the public swarmed in. Some West Pakistanis trying to escape were hacked to death by the mob. Ahmed said he personally saw one man in the cantonment surrounded by a Bengali mob, pleading for his life, saying that he had his wife and children there, but they killed him—by shooting, spearing, chopping with *da* and so on. Ahmed said he felt very bad on seeing this scene. Continuing on the regretful note, he said women and children were killed by the Bengalis, and some women were raped and killed, or abducted. Some were rescued by other Bengalis and kept in the nearby jail, along with a few 'officers'.[30]

Santahar: Massacre of Non-Bengali Civilians by Bengalis

'... it was April 1971 in erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, my battalion reached a small town to the north called Santahar, which, I learnt later had a predominantly Bihari population', wrote Capt. (Brig.) Shaukat Qadir of the Pakistan army. 'The first noticeable thing was the stench; it pervaded the atmosphere, clogged one's nostrils; the stench of death and decaying bodies'.[31]

On another day in April a young 2nd Lieutenant just posted to 25 Punjab regiment and a Major were travelling by train from Rajshahi towards Naogaon to catch up with their unit, when they smelled the overwhelming stench of rotting bodies. The pits between the railway lines were full of corpses. The two officers, both new to East Pakistan, were shocked beyond words. They were told that the place was called Santahar.[32]

In a separate development, 205 Brigade was part of the reinforcements sent to East Pakistan as the conflict deteriorated. The Brigade Major, Anis Ahmad, flew into Dhaka with the brigade headquarters, while the bulk of the units went by sea to Chittagong. While he was in Dhaka a JCO from Joydevpur came—he said the East Bengal unit at Joydevpur had mutinied, all the West Pakistani officers had been killed and his own family had been massacred.[33]

By the second half of April, Maj. Anis and his unit had been ordered to Bogra. They took the train up. The stench of death could be smelt from miles before they got to Santahar. As they neared the station there were bodies along the tracks, the platforms were full of decomposed bodies. They stopped for a few hours and made a report for the divisional headquarters. Some Biharis had survived and told them what had happened.

Brig. (Capt.) Qadir of 13 FF has described the experience of his unit while searching the ghost-town of Santahar, house by house. In one building they had difficulty opening a door. 'When we finally did, the sight was the ugliest, most horrifying, grotesque experience of my life: the little room, about ten

feet by twelve, was filled with the bodies of children, ranging in age from a few months to a few years. They had, apparently, been held by their feet and their heads dashed against the walls, which were smeared with human brain and skull.... There was not one, including myself, who did not throw up. When we buried them, there were thirty four bodies'.[34]

Brig. Qadir stresses that this does not mean that the state forces were not guilty of other, horrifying acts, but that this was the ugliest scene he had personally witnessed. After this experience in Santahar, one of his men wanted to bash in the heads of captured Bengali militants. A similar experience is related by Capt. Sarwar of 18 Punjab at a railway junction beyond Ishwardi on the way to Rajshahi.[35] The Bihari railway workers' quarters there had a pond in the middle. Capt. Sarwar said that he and his colleagues found the pond and the area around it full of dead bodies—men, women and children—with grotesque evidence of bestiality such as infants stuck on spears and women's bodies slashed. Capt. Sarwar said a fellow young officer 'went mad' with grief and anger at the sight. They took photographs of the massacre and gave them to the relevant officer in the army. Other officers told me they recalled seeing photos of bodies in a pond, but none of these photos seemed to have reached the media.

The Government of Pakistan's White Paper estimated that 15,000 Biharis were killed in Santahar-Naogaon.

Chittagong: Descent into Lawlessness

'Anarchy—everyone was doing everything to everyone else'. That was how one Pakistan army officer summed up the situation in Chittagong by the end of March.

On 25 March Brig. Iqbal Shafi, based in Comilla, got a call from Gen. Tikka Khan:[36] Bengali personnel had rebelled in Chittagong and he had to move there at once. Most of the brigade's units were dispersed around its vast area of responsibility stretching from Sylhet in the north to the last southern point of Chittagong. Leaving the artillery unit, 53 Field regiment in Comilla, Brig. Shafi set off for Chittagong that night with 24 FF commanded by Lt Col. Shahpour. The hundred miles over two huge rivers had to be covered on foot and by country boats where bridges were destroyed. The wireless set went out of order as well. Close to Chittagong, Lt Col. Shahpour was killed by a sniper.

'All the operations were going as planned except that there was no contact with HQ53 Bde, which had moved from Comilla to occupy Chittagong',

wrote Maj. Gen. Mitha. He went looking for the missing unit by helicopter and eventually located it ten miles from Chittagong. 'The Brigade Commander (Iqbal Shafi, if I remember rightly) met me: ...He had only one battalion with him and the Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Shahpur, had been killed just ten minutes earlier. He seemed very calm and confident... he told me he required no help and would reach Chittagong as soon as possible'.[37]

Brig. Shafi did reach Chittagong, and taking artillery assistance from the navy, secured the EPR Centre. Though 24 FF was a Pathan regiment, its second-in-command was a Bengali, Maj. Amjad. After Lt Col. Shahpour's death Brig. Shafi took over command of the battalion himself, keeping Maj. Amjad as his 2IC. This Bengali officer remained loyal to the Pakistan Army to the end and was a POW in India after the war.

However, another Bengali Major, Zia-ur Rahman of 8 EBR, had rebelled, killing his own commanding officer, a West Pakistani. When Brig. Shafi was instructor at the Pakistan Military Academy, Zia and Ershad (both later General-Presidents of Bangladesh) had been cadets there. Brig. Shafi told me that he chased Zia for the next couple of weeks, through Chandraghona, Kaptai, Rangamati, Ramgarh, but then Zia crossed over to India. In an interesting twist, the Chakma chief Raja Tridiv Roy writes in his memoirs that Zia and his men were attacked by a combined force of Pakistani soldiers and Mizos who were fighting for independence from India, while Chakmas helped him over the borders of Chakma territory when he was on the run.[38]

Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury was adjutant to Major Zia in 8 EBR and rebelled along with him. He fought against his former compatriots in the Pakistan Army in Chittagong and its surrounding area, along with fellow-rebel Capt. Haroon Ahmed Chowdhury (later Major-General and Ambassador for Bangladesh). However, Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury did not make it to India. During a battle at Kalurghat bridge on 11 April he was seriously injured and taken captive, spending much of the rest of the year as a prisoner in military hospitals in Chittagong and Dhaka.[39]

Units of 205 Brigade, freshly arrived in East Pakistan, were also ordered to go to Chittagong. The airport was under rebel attack and Gen. Mitha, the founder of the commando forces, was said to be defending it.[40] Maj. Anis Ahmad flew in there in a C-130 one night, amid shooting. They spent several days defending themselves at key spots. There were dead bodies all over Chittagong; a lot of killing seemed to be settling of scores. Local people would tell the army the most harrowing stories. In Karnaphuli Mill, Bengalis were reported to have collected all the West Pakistani and Bihari personnel and

their families in a club hall, and killed them. Maj. Anis went there and saw piles of dead bodies—only one woman and child had survived in a flat. The victims were given a mass burial.[41] In late April or early May Capt. (Lt Gen.) Ali Kuli Khan of army aviation flew into Chittagong. He visited the Karnaphuli Mill. The clubhouse still had the signs of the massacre—bloodstains on the walls and on the stairs of the houses.[42] Foreign news media also reported evidence of the mass murder of non-Bengalis at the mill.[43]

Raja Tridiv Roy has also written of the 'pandemonium' in Chittagong at the time, with excesses committed by all sides. An uncle and two cousins of his were reported to have been taken away by army personnel never to be seen again. On the other hand, 'In Rangamati, from 26 March onward, Awami League cadres, in league with the rebel Police and the East Pakistan Rifles, began rounding up the 'Biharis'... The Bengalis looked askance at the hill people for not joining in their foul carnage and threatened that their turn would come, after the West Pakistanis and Biharis'. Roy writes of appalling Bengali atrocities against non-Bengali men, women and children. People were forced by Awami League cadres to give them money and rice, and by the time the army arrived, many villagers looked upon them as deliverance.[44]

Tangail: Rebel Resistance Crushed by Army

On the road to Tangail from Dhaka lies a small village called Satiarchora. In the last days of March, mutinous Bengali EPR and police passed Satiarchora and set up a line of resistance there. According to a villager, Joynal Abedin Dewan, a rebel named Fazlul Rahman Farooq from Tangail instructed them to resist at this spot. The more famous—or infamous—guerrilla rebel leader Kader ('Tiger') Siddiqi joined this group of rebels.[45]

Abedin had been employed in Khulna at the time, but had returned to his village after the military crackdown started. He had a gun, as did his brother Jumarat Ali Dewan, who was politically active under Shahjahan Siraj and had some weapons training. Most of the rest of the villagers knew nothing of war-fighting. According to Abedin, the rebel EPR and police built 'bunkers' and took up positions with their 'machine guns'.

In spite of the preparation, the rebels were caught unawares at daybreak on 3 April when a large convoy of the Pakistan Army came rolling down the road. According to Abedin there were about 70 vehicles, and in spite of being unprepared, the Bengali rebels fired and destroyed ten to twelve vehicles, killing 200–250 soldiers. Even my strongly pro-liberation Bangladeshi colleagues

thought this was an exaggeration and should be realistically adjusted to possibly one or two vehicles destroyed and a dozen or so soldiers killed. What did not seem to be an exaggeration was the '*brishtir moto guli*' (rain of bullets), as Abedin put it, when the army retaliated. He dropped his gun and ran for cover. His brother Jumarat, who was in a bunker, was killed. In Abedin's version 300 villagers were killed in the battle—a figure which probably should be adjusted downwards proportionately to the alleged casualties on the army side. According to Abedin, Kader Siddiqi arrived that morning to find the battle raging and retreated to Natiapara, where he fought later.

Having crushed the rebels, half a dozen soldiers allegedly went from hut to hut in the village, setting them on fire and killing anything that moved. However, according to Abedin the soldiers did not harm women in any way, though some women and children got killed in the crossfire during the fighting. Then the army went away, returning the next day to disperse the crowds that had gathered for the funerals—only five people could do the *janaza*, added his wife Shiuli Abedin. From then until independence the villagers were displaced—everyone lived in other villages, though there were no further encounters with the army. Later in the year when the army organised the 'Razakars'—local auxiliary forces—these elements indulged in looting and harassing of Hindus, a few of whom were killed as well.

In Abedin's view, most of the 'certificates' handed out to supposed 'freedom fighters' in Bangladesh are false. In local politics he supported a political rival of the more famous rebel leader Kader Siddiqi and described Siddiqi as an 'opportunist' and 'extremist', with whom Sheikh Mujib had been forced to compromise. In a small illustration of the degree of political factionalism on the 'liberation' side of the war, he complained that Siddiqi had conspired to deny the battle at Satiarchora its due recognition. This is unfair criticism, however, as in his memoirs Kader Siddiqi confirmed that there was a 'frontline' at Satiarchora, paid tribute to those who fought and died there including Jumarat Ali Dewan, and even agreed that ten to twelve vehicles of the army were damaged, with 'hundreds' of casualties. He wrote that he had gone back to get more ammunition and therefore had not taken part in this particular battle.[46]

In his memoirs Kader Siddiqi also described the arrival in Tangail of Maj. Safiullah with the rebellious 2 EBR from Joydevpur.[47] The B Company of 2 EBR had been stationed at the circuit house at Tangail from before. Of the five officers in the company three were Bengali and two were West Pakistani. According to Siddiqi, when Maj. Safiullah and the rest of 2 EBR moved on to

Mymensingh, the Bengali officers of B Company killed the two captive West Pakistani officers and left their bodies for disposal with the local political activists. They first buried the two bodies behind the circuit house, then dug them up and reburied them by the river, and finally dug them up again and buried them at the Tangail cemetery.[48]

Kushtia: Army Unit Overwhelmed by Rebels

Lt Ataullah Shah had been serving in East Pakistan with 27 Baloch regiment since April 1970.[49] He went to Kushtia for election duties in December 1970 and returned to base in Jessore. In February-March they were restricted to the cantonment, but during the night of 25–26 March some of them—D Company plus some of A Company—were ordered to Kushtia again. They were about 155 men and four officers: the company commander Maj. Sheikh Muhammad Shoaib, his 2IC Capt. Sammad Ali, Capt. Aslam of A Company, and Lt Ataullah. Their tasks were to find the DC and SP (District Commissioner and Superintendent of Police) and local MNAs (legislators), disarm the police and take over the telephone exchange.

The company headquarters was set up at the Kushtia Zilla School. One platoon under Capt. Aslam went off to the telephone exchange. Capt. Sammad and Lt Ataullah went to the police lines with another platoon, about thirty to thirty-five men, to take control of the armoury. They called at the addresses of the DC, SP and MNAs—nobody was at home. The few guards at the police armoury were disarmed and the army installed its own guards. Naib Subedar Ayub took over the wireless station with about fourteen men. There was no fighting. The place was familiar and relations with local people were good from the time of the elections. Lt Ataullah stayed on at the police lines.

From the next day the army patrolled the town in groups. The SP and DC turned up. Waqar Naseem Mian, a West Pakistani civil servant posted in Kushtia, came by the company headquarters. It turned out that the police lines were empty—most of the Bengali police had deserted. 27–28 March passed quietly with only one or two sporadic incidents like an attempted sabotage of the railway line.

In the early hours of 29 March, Lt Ataullah saw something that alarmed him for the first time. Hundreds of people were leaving town—a silent human exodus—along the Meherpur Road. It went on for hours. He tried to ask them why, but they would not answer. In the evening the DC and SP appeared at the company HQ and showed them a note which said that anyone who helped West Pakistanis would be killed. They said an attack was planned for

the night. The officers ordered extra vigilance, but were not sure whether the note was a hoax.

That night, suddenly, with a loud recitation of the *kalma*, firing started from all sides, including mortar fire. They were surrounded, and all four army positions were under attack. The battle went on till dawn—by then Ataullah and his men were low on ammunition and had several casualties. The company commander asked all the groups to return to the headquarters at the school. Ataullah and Aslam managed to get there with their remaining men, but there was no news of Ayub. Firing continued all day.

At first they were told that they would get air support and that more troops were on their way, but later they were told that neither was available—they would have to make their own way back to Jessore. About seventy of them, plus the injured, piled into the few available vehicles and set off into the night. Maj. Shoaib's jeep hit an electric pole—he got into the last jeep with Sammad and Ataullah. Down the road, two jeeps in front of them suddenly fell into a sabotaged bridge, and firing started again. Everyone took cover. When Ataullah came back, all the vehicles except the one with the injured were empty—there was no one about. He pulled out the injured cook from one of the fallen jeeps. They started to walk when suddenly they were surrounded by men with sticks.

When Ataullah came to, he was in a hut, his arms and legs tied. A Bengali policeman—Ataullah still remembers his badge number was 79—put his knee on his chest and tried to gouge out his left eye. In the day he was taken by jeep to Jhenida. By a bridge that looked well guarded by uniformed Bengalis, Ataullah saw a group of men holding down Capt. Sammad Ali and 'slaughtering' him.

At Jhenida Police Station more men of the company were brought in-Havildar Mazula, a Pathan, had his right arm nearly severed, but still asked Ataullah in Pushtu how he was. Naik Ashraf was dumped in the room; his body was completely swollen and he was unconscious. Altogether about twelve to fourteen people were put in there, all injured and bleeding. There was a crowd outside and some firing was heard. In the next room telephone messages were being exchanged—he heard the name 'Bhattacharya' (a Hindu Bengali Brahmin name).

In the afternoon, all of them were thrown onto the back of an open truck as a crowd stood chanting. As the truck drove along, the Bengalis riding on it beat the already severely injured West Pakistanis with bamboo poles that had knives fitted on them. Ataullah has a scar on his head from one of those blows.

Occasionally the truck stopped and one or two of the prisoners were thrown off, like bait, to waiting crowds. At one point Ataullah was thrown off too.

He landed on soft ground, still tied up. He asked for water. He recalled that some people came, picked him up and carried him to a boat; then the boat stopped, he was picked up again and taken to a village dispensary. He was put on a table and given a bowl of milk and two bananas. The people helping him were Bengali—but clearly of a different mentality from the ones who had captured him. They removed the ropes and bandaged his head, gave him a shirt and a *lungi*, and continued to feed him milk and bananas. Later that day a truck with uniformed people came and Ataullah was tied up again, blindfolded and taken to the Chuadanga circuit house, near the Indian border, where he was quizzed by a rebel member of 1 EBR over tea. The questions were specific: had they been raping women? Ataullah answered 'no'. How many people had he killed? Ataullah related the incident of an attempted sabotage of the railway lines where someone had been shot, but was alive. He was given food and locked up for two or three days.

One day a 'BBC reporter' came and interviewed him. Before the interview he was given fresh bandages and a shirt.[50] Then one day he was tied up and blindfolded again, driven off and handed over to some other people. After more driving he ended up in Calcutta—first at the centre of the Indian Border Security Force (BSF), then at the Indian army's cantonment at Fort William. He was questioned over and over again by the Indians, who seemed especially interested in tank regiments. He was also given medical treatment, toiletries and magazines. When he opened one of the magazines he saw a photo of a group of Bengalis in East Pakistan holding up the severed head of Naseem Mian, the civil servant in Kushtia who, according to Ataullah, had declined to retreat with the army to Jessore.

Later, in detention in Panagarh, Ataullah found several West Pakistani officers and men of other ranks already in Indian custody. By November he was in Agra Jail. Eventually he learned that only eleven of the 155 men who had been in Kushtia had made it to Jessore.

Comilla Cantonment: Civil War Encapsulated

If ever there was a case that illustrates vividly how 1971 ripped apart the very fabric of family, community and society in East Pakistan, what happened at Comilla cantonment is surely it: two cousins, both Bengali, both in the Pakistan Army, serving in the same regiment, in the same place, under the same

commanding officer. In 1971 one remained loyal to the Pakistan Army, while the other joined the fight for Bangladesh and accused his cousin of mass murder. They fought on opposite sides. At the end of the war the loyalist went to India as a POW, the rebel returned from India to independent Bangladesh. Both remained in their respective armies. The loyalist retired as a Brigadier of the Pakistan Army and lives in Pakistan. The rebel retired as a Major-General of the Bangladesh Army and lives in Bangladesh.

Maj. Gen. Imamuz Zaman of the Bangladesh army was kind enough to receive me at home late one evening in Dhaka after a long day of other engagements. He gave me tea and referred me to his book on the 1971 war. The book is in English; his Bengali account of events in Comilla cantonment had been published earlier in an edited volume. Brig. Abul Lais Ahmaduz Zaman of the Pakistan army was kind enough to meet me late one evening in Rawalpindi after a long day of other engagements. He and another loyalist Bengali officer, Col. Kamal Ud Din, gave me tea and talked about the choices they had to make in 1971.

In 1971 Capt. A.L.A. Zaman and Lt Imamuz Zaman both served in the 53 Field regiment based in Comilla. Their commanding officer (CO) was Lt Col. Yaqub Malik and the brigade commander was Brig. Iqbal Shafi.[51] Lt Imamuz Zaman's account of what happened at Comilla cantonment in March 1971 has been published in at least three different places: in Bengali in an edited volume, in English as part of his book on Bangladesh's liberation war, and as a story by Sidney Schanberg filed from Agartala in India on 13 April and published in the *New York Times* on 17 April 1971, where Lt Imam's name has been changed to 'Dabir' to protect his identity.[52]

According to Lt Imamuz Zaman, in the run-up to military action 'Brig. Iqbal Shafi, the Brigade Commander of Comilla was frequently holding conferences of Commanding Officers (CO) of all the units, in which no Bengali officers were allowed to attend'. Brig. Iqbal Shafi looked mildly surprised when I put this to him. The commanding officers, of course, were West Pakistani, so there was no issue of excluding any Bengali officer. Capt. A.L.A. Zaman, for his part, said categorically that he, a Bengali officer, was never excluded from any deliberations—Imamuz Zaman, being only a second lieutenant of a few months service, may not have been part of more senior officers' meetings.

Lt Imamuz Zaman alleges that in the evening of 25 March, Lt Col. Yaqub Malik announced that curfew had been declared in the whole country and that he wanted 'the whole of Comilla city filled up with corpses'. As Bengali officers

would find these duties unpleasant, they would be offered office duties. However, Lt Imam says that he, Capt. A.L.A. Zaman, another Bengali officer, Capt. Nurul Islam, and a Bihari officer were actually locked up in the cantonment. While there he mostly talked with the Bengali Capt. Nurul Islam: 'We did not trust Capt. Zaman as he was very much a pro-Pakistani'. In his book Lt Imam wrote that Capt. Zaman repeatedly asked to see the CO and offered to assist him as a 'patriot'. The CO accepted his offer and Capt. Zaman was let out. According to Lt Imam, early on 26 March the DC and SP of Comilla were brought to the cantonment and locked up in a nearby room.

Capt. A.L.A. Zaman readily agreed that he was a proud Pakistani and that the other Bengali officers did not include him in their secessionist discussions. However, he flatly denied that he was ever locked up. He said he had joined the unit's activities from the start. Those who did not want to take part in the military action in the city had been given the option of office duty—like answering the phone—and according to Capt. Zaman, that was what Lt Imamuz Zaman and the other two officers were doing. Indeed, in his book Lt Imam talked about being on telephone duty one day.

Curiously, Lt Imamuz Zaman does not mention in any of his accounts that the loyalist Capt. Zaman is his cousin, while it was the first thing Capt. Zaman mentioned to me as we started talking, along with the many other relatives he had in Comilla city. Another thing that Lt Imamuz Zaman does not mention is that Brig. Iqbal Shafi left Comilla on 25 March to go to Chittagong, and therefore was not in any way associated with the allegations of mass murder in Comilla that he describes for the subsequent days.[53]

The truly grave allegation made by Lt Imamuz Zaman is the mass murder of Bengali soldiers and civilians in the cantonment and an attempt by fellow officers to kill him and the two other 'imprisoned' officers. He describes a gruesome experience during which he pretended to be dead and pulled off a miraculous escape. In the Bengali version he alleges that a West Pakistani officer brought into the cantonment truckloads of civilian prisoners who were beaten to death on the orders of another high-ranking officer. In the English version, he added another name among those of the alleged perpetrators of these atrocities.

A somewhat different view was given to me by another West Pakistani officer, Maj. Abdul Majid, who joined 53 Field regiment in Comilla around 7–8 April.[54] He had not been present on the dates of the alleged killings, but said that it was common knowledge in the unit that the local DC and SP had been killed—in retaliation for their prior actions against the army—though the SP's

family were not told this when they came to enquire.[55] Capt. Bukhari and Lt Col. Yaqub were rumoured to have killed people. Bukhari was killed in an ambush later that year. The Bengali nationalist side was hardly better, however—Maj. Majid said that on entering Brahmanbaria in April, he saw the place littered with bodies of Biharis—including children—killed by Bengalis.

The story of the attempted murder and miraculous escape of Lt Imamuz Zaman takes a few intriguing turns. Lt Imamuz Zaman writes that on 30 March, Capt. Ausaf Ahmed, a West Pakistani officer, shot the imprisoned DC and SP, and that a JCO, Subedar Faiz Sultan, shot Lt Imam and the other two officers inside the room where they were locked up. According to him, he and the two officers were shot at close range with a sub-machine gun—in his case he was shot while lying on the floor. Lt Imam says he was wounded and pretended to be dead before escaping. His account states that the other two officers were killed.

Maj. Abdul Majid, however, told me that the Bihari officer had survived—he had seen him in the hospital when he got to Comilla. Capt. Zaman also confirmed that the Bihari officer had been alive. Most curiously, the Bengali rebel Maj. Safiullah of 2 EBR has given a lengthy account in his book of a conversation between the Bihari officer and Lt Imam *after* they were shot—which he could only have heard from Lt Imam himself—in which the Bihari officer claimed to have been shot in crossfire and to have urged Lt Imam not to escape![56] Yet Lt Imam never mentions this in any of his (three) accounts.

The loyalist Capt. Zaman's take on what happened is as follows. He had been out on duty when he was contacted by wireless to be told that his cousin and the two other officers had tried to run off. They had been shot at. The other Bengali officer had died, the Bihari officer and Lt Imamuz Zaman were injured, but the latter had got away. According to this version the shooting took place not inside a locked room, but outside in the open as the three were running out of the cantonment.

The *New York Times* report is a short approximation of the Bengali (and English) versions written by Maj. Gen. Imamuz Zaman later, but is different in a few aspects. For example, it says that three Bengali officers were locked up by the West Pakistanis, who later tried to kill them, while Lt Imam's version clarifies that it was three officers, two Bengali and one Bihari. Also, the *New York Times* report says Lt Imam was hit with three bullets—one on the right wrist, one grazing his cheek and the third ripping his shirt at the back. It says Lt Imam rubbed the blood from his wrist over his face to pretend he was dead. Lt Imam's own version says he was hit on his right wrist, his right eye and the

shirt at the back. It says his right eye was bleeding profusely and he was not able to see with it. Either way these are light wounds for someone shot at close range with an SMG while lying on the ground. As the Bihari officer survived as well, the JCO accused of the shooting must have been a very poor shot. In his book Lt Imamuz Zaman says he was sent to disrupt the Comilla-Chandpur road on behalf of the rebels in the second week of April, so he had recovered from his injuries within a few days. Finally, the *New York Times* report does not say anything about truck-loads of civilians being brought into the cantonment and massacred—if 'Dabir' had stated this to Sidney Schanberg, Schanberg would surely have reported it, and it would have been headline news.

In his book *Identity and Violence* Amartya Sen, who identifies himself among other things as 'a Bengali with Bangladeshi ancestry', writes, 'In the carnage that occurred in Dhaka in March 1971, during the painful process of separation, with the Pakistani Army's frenzied attempt to suppress the Bengali rebellion, the identity divisions were along the lines of language and politics, not religion, with Muslim soldiers from West Pakistan brutalising—and killing—mainly Muslim dissenters (or suspected dissenters) in East Pakistan'.[57]

Sen, who writes persuasively about the 'cultivated violence associated with identity conflicts' and the illusion of 'singular affiliation' identities, is only partially correct in his remark on the war in East Pakistan. First, the Muslim soldiers of West Pakistan were not 'brutalising' Bengalis simply on the basis of language or ethnicity, as there were Bengalis on both sides of the conflict, but on the basis of politics—support for secession—for which they were using proxies like religion (Hindus), party membership (Awami League) or age/gender (adult male) in addition to overt militant activity. Second, Sen completely omits to mention the 'brutalisation'—and killing—of non-Bengalis and non-secessionists (East Pakistani and West Pakistani) by Bengali nationalists who did indeed define 'non-belonging' on the basis of language and ethnicity. It is most unlikely that Sen's omission is due to any cover-up on behalf of the land of his ancestry. It is almost certainly because Sen is unaware—just as I was—of the full manifestation of the super-imposition of exclusive identities and the politics of hate on the ground in East Pakistan, having been exposed only to the edited narrative of the victorious side.

5

VILLAGE OF WIDOWS

'SECURING' THE COUNTRYSIDE

'*Shala competent chhilo*. (The bastard was competent)'

– Muhammad Abdus Sattar, survivor, on the Pakistani officer who shot him and all the men in his village

'*I hate all armies. Yours, mine—all armies*'.

– Muhammad Zinnatul Alam, the only man whose life was spared by the Pakistani officer who shot all the men in his village

On the banks of the Padma in Rajshahi district, where the river forms the border with India, there is a village called Thanapara. Among those who remember, it is known as the 'village of widows'. According to the surviving villagers, on 13 April 1971 a unit of the Pakistan army came to the village, which is located right next to the Sarda police academy. The police academy had been taken over by Bengali rebels, who dispersed when the army arrived. The army regained control of the academy and appeared by the riverside at Thanapara, where villagers as well as escaping rebels had taken refuge. Women and children were separated from the men and sent back to the village. All the men were rounded up together and shot. Their bodies were stacked in a pile and set alight.

Thanapara is one of the grisliest of stories that I heard in the course of my study of the 1971 war. It has all the ingredients that shamed the Pakistan army the world over as it crushed the Bengali rebellion in the Eastern province. But

Thanapara itself does not seem to have made it to the world press. Ironically, at the time it happened the Western press was preoccupied with the coverage of the conviction of Lt William Calley of the US Army for the My Lai massacre in Vietnam.

Yet Thanapara is not a simple story of evil. This chapter depicts the events that unfolded in Thanapara that day through the voices of people who were there—a boy, a girl, a woman who was widowed, a man who was shot and set on fire but did not die, another who became the only man spared by the officer on the ground, a commanding officer of the Pakistan army who led his men on the journey from Dhaka to Rajshahi, and a young lieutenant who fought in the battle to recapture the Sarda police academy and went to the banks of the Padma.

The boy. Raihan Ali was about twelve or thirteen years old in 1971.[1] His wife, Mahmooda Begum Guinea, was about the same age. Raihan thought the army came from Rajshahi that day, probably to capture the Sarda police academy and an EPR (East Pakistan Rifles) camp in the locality. On the road by the Sarda bazaar, a Bengali shot at them. Later a few more shots were fired at them, possibly by the armed Bengali rebels at a place called Belpukur. The Pakistan army unit started firing back.

Because of the '*golaguli*' (shooting), the villagers decided to go to the banks of the Padma for safety. Raihan thinks about three thousand men, women and children may have gathered there, including villagers, people from neighbouring areas and also some of the rebel Bengali police.[2] The river bank looked like a '*mela*' (fair).

The water was at a low level, the bank fell steeply down to the river below. People were crowded on the lower level close to the river. Suddenly Raihan saw a soldier standing on the higher ground. He told them to come up and said that they would all be sent home. While they were all trying to scramble up, one young man tried to hide by the bank. The soldier saw him, jumped down, dragged him out and shot him. The rest, after getting to the higher ground, were told to separate—men on one side, women and children on the other.

Raihan went to sit with his father (around 46 years old), his older brother (around 17 years) and his *dulabhai* (brother-in-law, around 27 or 28 years). He was sitting close to the end of the men's line, a couple of people away from a soldier (or officer). He saw the man indicating to him that he should come out of the line. Raihan pretended not to see. The man sitting next to Raihan thought he was the one being asked to step out and got up, but the soldier/

officer kicked him viciously back to the ground. He then caught Raihan by the arm, got him up and told him to go and join the women and children in the other line.

The women and children were now asked to leave. As they left, the officer in charge began questioning the assembled men—who was a Hindu, who was in the police. Someone got up. He was shot. The rest of them were still sitting when Raihan left the scene.

Raihan now runs a non-governmental organisation in Thanapara sponsored by the Swedish 'Swallows', which gave employment and a means of survival to many of the widows of the village after the war. In connection with his work Raihan has come into contact with Pakistanis—he cannot bring himself to have anything to do with them.

The girl. Mahmooda Begum, now Raihan Ali's wife, was on the women's side of the separation.[3] She said some of the soldiers who were standing guard on the women's side had '*korun*' (sorrowful) looks on their faces as the whole thing was going on. As the women cried, some of the soldiers had tears in their eyes too. Not all of them were bad—'Beluchi' soldiers were the better ones among them, they found during the year, Mahmooda said.[4]

The military came back from time to time to the village, to look for a Muktijoddha (freedom fighter) called 'Shibli', who used to come and go. They would come looking for him and go away again. Finally one day they caught Shibli in a paddy field, along with a couple of associates. Actually Shibli and his mates were spotted by local 'Razakars' (an auxiliary force of loyalist Bengalis), who guarded them and prevented them from escaping, and handed them over to the army. Shibli was killed on 9 May, after four days in custody.

The boy again. Raihan recalled several other encounters with the army in the months that followed. Once he was passing by the police academy and was caught by a soldier who took him in for questioning. Eventually he said he would let him go if Raihan brought him a can of milk from the bazaar. He gave him a milk-can. Raihan went to the bazaar, dropped the milk-can in a shop and ran away. Another time a soldier demanded he get him cigarettes, but Raihan ran away and did not get him any.

One day Raihan was swimming across the watery bits in the fields when he was caught by a soldier wandering there. The soldier thought he was a Muktijoddha as he was swimming in the water. He let him go after a while. In another encounter Raihan was up a tree checking if there were any cattle in the paddy fields. He came down to find a soldier, deeply suspicious, thinking he was a

lookout. He was about to hit him with the '*rifle-er baant*' (rifle butt), but in a reflex action Raihan also produced his *da* (sickle). The man baulked, and went away. Later Raihan heard he had come back with reinforcements and was searching the area.

One time when soldiers turned up at the village, Raihan hid among some bushes in the backyard. They would have gone away, but the neighbour, a 'Razakar', volunteered to them the information that he had seen Raihan in the house just a moment ago. Raihan was discovered and taken to work on building a new 'bunker' just by the police academy. After a while, an officer—Raihan is sure (though it is not clear why) that this man was a 'Beluchi'—came by and when he saw the child working, asked him who had brought him there. Raihan pointed out the two soldiers, upon which the 'Beluchi' officer reprimanded them severely. He then gave Raihan a 50 rupee (or was it a 20 rupee) note from his pocket and told him to go home.

The widow. Uyajaan was uncertain of her age. She was probably in her fifties when I met her in 2004, her face withered by a hard life.[5]

She had two sons, one a mere babe in arms, when on that day in 1971 her family was called out to the river bank. The military came and made them come back up, and while leaving with the other women and children she saw them kicking some people with '*iya boro boot juta*' (these big boots)—and shooting them. Later they shot all the men and set fire to the bodies.

Uyajaan's husband, the husband of her *nonod* (sister-in-law), and a *debar* (younger brother-in-law) were killed. Left with two small children, she could not go back to the river bank to retrieve their corpses or bury them. She followed some other people to India where her parents were, but came back after only three days.

Two years later, she was given work at the 'Swallows'. In spite of working here, she could not afford to educate her two sons—one has a shop, the other is a *din-majur* (day labourer). Her husband and brother-in-law had also been *din-majurs*; none of them was involved in any politics.

One young *debar* (brother-in-law) was saved because he was too young and was sent off with the women. When he grew up, he threw Uyajaan and his other aunt, who was also widowed that day, out of the house.

The man. Muhammad Abdus Sattar is a remarkable man.[6] He is the father of Raihan Ali. At about seventy-eight years of age, he was tall, erect and articulate, demonstrating not only physical fitness but a mental strength that clearly helped him to emerge out of his nightmarish experience without losing his

mind. He also demonstrated an extraordinary degree of fairness and balance in speaking of the actions of those who had committed such a terrible act of violence against him and his fellow-villagers—a quality rare among many Bangladeshis who did not suffer even a fraction of what Sattar has been through.

On 13 April 1971, Muhammad Abdus Sattar was tending his shop. He had just come to have his lunch at home in the village when a great commotion broke out. Other villagers said they must all flee to the river bank as there was '*golaguli*' (shooting) going on. So he did, along with many others. Sattar pointed out that someone had first shot at the passing Pakistani unit in the bazaar, and some others had shot at them a little later—the army had fired back and eliminated them.

After Raihan and the women had left the river bank, Sattar and all the other men remained, surrounded by the military. He described in detail the actions of the 'captain' of the Pakistani soldiers ('captain' is used here in the sense of the 'leader' and may not have been the officer's actual rank). The officer was clearly in charge—he was ordering the others. He asked questions like, 'Which ones of you are Hindus?' When nobody would answer, he picked out people—'You step out—you are Hindu'. Then—'Which ones of you are police?' When nobody said anything, he picked a few again: 'You—you are police'.

I asked if the officer picked the correct people, that is, were they really Hindus or members of the rebel Bengali police? Sattar said the officer was dead right every time—'*Shala competent chhilo*' (The bastard was competent). The men the officer picked out were separated from the others and shot.

A man called Azizul Alam was a '*moktar*' (legal practitioner) at the Rajshahi court. He was asked to step out and answered questions—he said who he was, that he was a Muslim, and so on. Up to that point it was fine. But Alam didn't stop there—'*mukhe mukhe kotha bolechhilo, bolechhilo, 'ami Awami League kori, tomra jai koro na keno, desh swadhin hobei'*. (He talked back in the face of the officer, he said, 'I work for the Awami League, whatever you might do, my country will be free'.) Azizul Alam was shot.

The nephew of Azizul Alam was a young man called 'Jinnah'. He was tall and fair, with light eyes. He used to study at the Mymensingh Agricultural College. The 'captain' refused to believe that he was a Bengali. When he said his name was 'Jinnah', it caused astonishment.[7] He told the officer that he was in fact a Bengali, pointed out his house in the village when asked where he lived, and stated that he studied at the Mymensingh Agricultural College. On hearing that the 'captain' switched to speaking in English—it seemed he was testing whether Jinnah was telling the truth. But still, he refused to

believe Jinnah was a Bengali. He told him to go. When Jinnah got to the soldiers guarding the area the officer waved to them and told them '*janey do*' (let him go).

To the remaining men the 'captain' said, 'You are all Indians, you have come across the river'. Here it is important to note the topography of the area. Sattar took me to the river bank where all this happened. The huge river Padma has broken and eroded its banks considerably. 'The place where this happened is now over there', said Sattar, pointing over a semi-watery *chor*[8] area. Across the river I could see land and trees on the other side—that was India. In April 1971, there was relatively little water in the river and crossing back and forth was easy.

The Pakistanis seemed to think that the people huddling on the river bank were not villagers, but Indian agents who had come across the river. The villagers denied this, to no avail. The 'captain' asked, 'If you are villagers, then why are you all here, hiding by the river?' They told him it was because they were frightened, but the officer was not convinced. He said, 'If you are not Indian agents, why did you shoot at us? If you are villagers, then we are your army, we are here to protect you, we are your servants. But you shot at us'. That, Sattar admitted, some people certainly had done.

After he had killed the initially selected people—alleged Hindus and police—the interrogation of the rest was going on in this manner, when at one point the officer appeared to receive a message on the 'wireless walkie-talkie' from his superiors. The instruction seemed to be to kill them all. They opened fire on the assembled group of men. Sattar was hit by five bullets in his left leg and left arm. He showed me some of the wounds—one was on the left leg, the bullet had entered at the front and exited from the back of the leg; that leg had become '*okejo*' (useless). The dead and injured lay on the ground. Then the soldiers began to stack the bodies. Sattar was carried and stacked with other bodies. Then kerosene was sprinkled over them and a shot was fired. Sattar felt heat. The fire had started at the other end of the heap of bodies. He was still alive. The people above and below him were dead. The soldiers seemed to be going away. It was getting dark. He wriggled out of his vest, which was soaked with kerosene, and dragged himself out of the stack of the dead. The soldiers had gone. He managed to stagger back the distance to his own home. There was no one around, only a few dogs barking in a desolate manner. He called out. On hearing his voice his family members came out of the bushes. They tried to bandage the bleeding wounds—he was aware that the loss of blood might kill him. The next day they tried to get a doctor.

Sattar stayed in relatives' houses for some time. It took several weeks for him to recover and he was bedridden for quite a while. Then he returned to Thanapara.

According to Sattar, two army units were coming down the road from the Rajshahi side that day. One was a 'Pathan' unit which went towards the 'Muktarpur Cadet College'. The other was a 'Punjabi' unit which came to Thanapara and the Sarda police academy. According to him there were also many villagers by the river bank in the Muktarpur area, just like in Thanapara. The Pathans just told them to go home. No one was killed there.

The units posted at the Sarda police academy changed over time, and not everyone was like the ones who had come on 13 April. Sattar remembered one 'good' officer in particular—a 'Major Shafiullah'—who was posted later that year to the army camp at Sarda police academy.[9] This officer talked to the villagers and tried to work in cooperation with them. He even asked for their cooperation in keeping discipline among his own troops. According to Sattar he told him and other villagers that if any of his men went into the village trying to loot things or harass women, they should give them a sound hiding—but not kill them—and then bring them to him for judgment. The villagers did in fact follow his instructions. In one instance a soldier went into a house asking, '*Murga? Murga?*' (chicken) He received a '*jhantar bari*' (blow with a broom) on his face by the lady in the kitchen, who had kept the *jhanta* (broom) dipped in *lonka bata* (chilli paste). The man nearly perished of the pain! He was captured by the villagers and duly produced before 'Major Shafiullah', who said he had better send him to a doctor first.

The youth called 'Jinnah'. The Agricultural University closed in February because of the 'troubles', and Muhammad Zinnatul Alam ('Jinnah') came back home to Thanapara.[10] Their house was right next to the Sarda police academy. At home there was his *chachi* (aunt, wife of father's younger brother), and two young *chachato* (cousin) brothers. Another cousin, Shibli, was in India. There was also his own younger brother, nineteen years of age, and his *bhognipoti* (sister's husband).

At the Sarda police academy the Bengali principal, Khaleq Sahab, was hesitant about joining the rebel movement at first, but was encouraged after the Bengali police revolted in Dhaka. But Capt. Rashid at the Rajshahi Cadet College was very active for the rebel cause from the start. The rebels took control of the Sarda police academy.

There were twenty-five West Pakistani trainees at Sarda, all about twenty-two years old, who were captured by the Bengalis. The Awami League mem-

bers of the 'action committee' wanted to kill them. Jinnah said that he and other local Bengalis objected to this and persuaded them to hand over the West Pakistani trainees to the Indian BSF (Border Security Force). This was done on 11 April. On the same day, Khaleq, who wanted to leave, was also shipped off with his family.

The water-level in the river dividing Thanapara from India was then very low. It was mostly *chor*, easy to cross back and forth. There was plenty of contact with India across the border. The son of a businessman in Baharampur in India and his associates would bring over cans of petrol, boxes of Charminar cigarettes, and so on.

Earlier, there had been an incident in a place called Gopalpur when a West Pakistani Major, his wife, and a Captain had been captured by Bengalis, who had cut off the Major's ears, nose and so on.[11] Also on 11 April, a Bihari escaping from Ishwardi was captured and the Awami League activists wanted to kill him too. Jinnah and the others tried to stop them but failed. This man was first shot—but, according to Jinnah, the Awami League cadres couldn't even shoot properly, so the man didn't die. Then they buried him alive in a sack in the *chor*—Jinnah went around later to look and heard sounds and saw the sand on the spot still moving. Later, the killers took the sack out and threw the man (possibly still alive) into the river. The chief culprit in this incident was the driver of the vice-principal of the academy.

On 13 April the rebels got a message on the wireless that the army was advancing from Dhaka towards Rajshahi (in reaction to the capture and killing of the Major and others).[12] When the army reached a place called Jholmolia, the Bengalis decided to abandon the fight, as the Sarda police academy had only 2–300 0.303 rifles. The army was said to be coming with 154 vehicles. However, the soldiers were not coming *in* the vehicles, but on foot through the villages along the side of the road, destroying everything they came across. There were shots fired and smoke—the army seemed to have a substance that set huts on fire when they shot, terrorising everyone.

All the people in the area, including Jinnah and others who had now abandoned their post at the wireless, and the mutinous police gathered at the river bank, trying to cross over to the other side. The water level was low, but there were not enough boats. Jinnah and his cousins tried to swim across, but they tired in a little while and came back. Then they saw a bamboo log floating by. Jinnah's *bhognipoti* (brother-in-law) wanted to catch it and float off, but Jinnah stopped him—accusing him of trying to run off abandoning his wife and child. His younger brother also wanted to flee by holding on to the log, but '*takeo*

badha dilam'. (I prevented him too). Other people caught hold of the floating logs and swam across.[13]

Jinnah was still stuck at the river bank when the soldiers appeared and told everyone to come up. They said the 'captain' would speak to them and then everyone would go home. I asked Jinnah to describe the officer's uniform; he said the lapel on his shoulder had '*teenta phool*'—three flowers, that is, stars. That suggests that the officer probably was a Captain by rank. Jinnah was suspicious of the idea of being addressed by the Captain and thought it was likely he would kill them, but he had no choice but to come up. He found women and children being separated and sent away, which made him sure that the men would be killed. The officer began to pick out people—Hindus, police, and so on. He shot the first one, a Hindu, in the chest. The man fell down, blood poured out of him. The next one he thought was a policeman (when in fact he wasn't); he spent five or six bullets to kill him, as he wasn't hitting any vital spot. In this way he kept choosing people, saying they were Hindu, or police, and killing them. He shot them himself, using his own weapon—the soldiers just stood surrounding the assembled men. At one point a friend next to Jinnah said, 'He's calling you'. Jinnah pretended not to see for a while, but had to get up and go eventually.

The officer spoke in Urdu, asking '*Tumhara naam kya hai?*' (What is your name?) On hearing the answer 'Jinnah', the officer asked his full name; Jinnah told him—Muhammad Zinnatul Alam.[14] What did he do? Jinnah replied he was a student. Where? The Agricultural University in Mymensingh. The conversation went on in Urdu and English.

Finally the Captain told Jinnah that he was not going to kill him—he was to identify to the officer who were the ones involved in the *Muktijuddha* (freedom struggle). Jinnah said that he had been away at college in Mymensingh and did not know who was doing what in this area. The Captain hit him hard with his rifle-butt on the shoulder, knocking him off balance. Still, he was told to go and sit a few feet away. A few others were also chosen to go and sit in this separate group, perhaps half a dozen men. One of them had a poultry business, Jinnah recalled.

Wireless messages were coming in all the time. At one point the soldiers surrounding the men started moving back to form a larger circle, away from the prisoners. The Captain then fired into the entire group with his automatic weapon. One soldier stood behind him, filling in a new round of ammunition as he finished each one. It was a horrible scene. The few of them sitting separately watched in terror.

After the killing spree, when all seemed quiet, this small group of the 'chosen' was told to accompany the Captain and the soldiers to the academy. There were jeeps there, and more senior officers—Jinnah reckons there were 'colonels', judging from their stripes. They were thanking the Captain for doing a good job. They also asked why their little group had been brought in alive.

At this point Jinnah noticed that several people were getting up and fleeing from the pile of 'dead' left behind. The soldiers noticed too and a few went back and shot at the escaping ones, some of whom fell to the ground. The Captain did some more shooting. Once Jinnah thought he heard his younger brother's voice as he was hit. Most of the time through this ordeal Jinnah had been thinking of his widowed mother—his father had died when he was five. He had not been thinking so much of his brother or brother-in-law among the pile of dead, only of his mother, who would now have no one left.

According to Jinnah, his uncle, Azizul Alam, used to 'go a bit mad' in the cold weather. Now that it was warm, he had been relatively sane. Jinnah saw him sitting among the pile of bodies, injured but alive, asking the Captain directly, '*Eto zulum keno*' (Why so much oppression?). The Captain shot him.

Now the Captain seemed concerned that not everyone had been killed by the shooting. He ordered the small group he had spared to stack the dead bodies in piles. While Jinnah was stacking the body of a teacher of his, he saw that his *lungi* had come loose, so he respectfully put it on him again. A soldier saw this and shouted at him, saying that he too would soon be in the same position. Falling forward into the bodies during the stacking, Jinnah became covered with blood.

Now the Captain ordered the group of corpse-stackers to line up around the pile of bodies. Jinnah was seized with a desperate desire to go up to the Captain and ask him to spare his life. That desperate motivation propelled him towards the Captain. The soldier who seemed to dislike him saw this and tried to stop him, but there was another soldier, or officer, who intervened and helped Jinnah. Jinnah thinks the man who helped him was Sindhi.[15] This officer had tears streaming down both his cheeks as he stood there with his weapon. He told the unfriendly soldier to go away, saying 'What is it to you that this man wants to beg for his life?' The soldier backed off. Then the 'Sindhi' officer encouraged Jinnah to go up to the Captain and plead for his life—maybe it would work. He accompanied him part of the way, but stopped just before Jinnah got to the Captain, leaving Jinnah to go the last stretch himself.

Jinnah stood in front of the Captain and begged for his life. He said his mother was a widow. His brother had now been killed, so if he was killed too, his widowed mother would have no one left. The Captain looked at him and remembered him—'Oh yes, you are the one who is studying at the agricultural college, so your mother is a widow, is she?' And then he said, 'Fine, you go, I'm letting you go'. Jinnah started to walk away, fearing he would be shot from behind, as that had happened to another person he had seen earlier. But nothing happened. He walked away.

I asked Dr Alam (Jinnah) to describe the Captain—he had been face-to-face with him. He was taller than himself, Alam said, and was one of those people who are good-looking in a cruel kind of way. I asked what his own diagnosis was of this officer, who killed so many unarmed, helpless people—was he mad? In a way, yes, said Alam. I asked why he thought he had spared him. Alam was not sure, but thought the fact that he kept talking about his widowed mother had an impact. Maybe the Captain was also the son of a widowed mother. Maybe the name Jinnah had an impact. It was hard to tell.

'I hate all armies. Yours, mine, all armies', said Alam, with a quiet intensity. He offered a similar analysis of the brutalities committed by the Pakistan army as Dr Abul Kalam of Dhaka had discussed with me—that the core problem was not anything peculiar to Pakistanis, but rather the phenomenon of men with guns let loose upon ordinary people.

After his life was spared, Jinnah went to his *chachi's* (aunt's) house and asked her to come away with him, but she refused to leave until she had seen his *chacha* (uncle). After pleading with her in vain for a while, he left the village and went to his maternal relatives' house—he remembers his mother frantically looking for the wound on his body, to account for the all blood he was covered in, until he told her he had no wound at all, it was all other people's blood.

The next day his grandfather went to Thanapara with his *tomtom*[16] and some of his labourers to look for the missing relatives. The labourers were reluctant to go, and had to be cajoled and threatened. The rest of the story is what Jinnah heard from them.

They found his *bhognipoti's* (sister's husband) body away from the pile of other dead bodies—it appears he was one of the people who were trying to escape after the first round of killing and were shot down as they ran. His younger brother's body was found in their own house. This has clearly haunted Alam the rest of his life. His brother had managed to survive and get back to their house, but he was injured, and one side of his body was burnt. There was nobody in the house to help him. There was evidence that he had gone upstairs

to his room, come to the kitchen, and tried to get water from the well. Eventually he had died of his wounds, unattended.

When I met him in 2004, Muhammad Zinnatul Alam 'Jinnah' was in his mid-fifties. He was fair, with large bluish eyes and a beard. He was articulate and well-spoken in English and Urdu. He was Professor at the Department of Entomology at an Agricultural University of Bangladesh. He had later studied in Florida and Arkansas in the United States, and held a PhD from the University of Arkansas; he was in Little Rock when Bill Clinton was the Governor of Arkansas and Hillary Clinton taught law at the university.

Muhammad Zinnatul Alam 'Jinnah's' life seems beset by tragedy. His wife died of cancer, his daughter who had been born in the US died after they returned, a son also died. When I met him his widowed sister's son-in-law had suddenly died of a stroke while only in his forties. At home I met his remaining daughter, the sister who was widowed at Thanapara and her daughter, and a little girl—his great-niece. Alam seemed to hold deeply to his faith and was going once again for the 'Haj' the following month.

'Jinnah' told me he believed that whatever bad things happen to someone are caused by something wrong he must have done earlier. Though he did not explicitly say so, I was left with the strong impression that he felt his personal tragedies were on account of his having prevented his younger brother and his brother-in-law from grabbing those bamboo logs and floating away in the Padma. He also said that it must be written—'*bidhilipi*'—that he would remain alone in life, as if in a profoundly tragic perpetuation of the indescribable solitude of the only man spared death that day, a boon that is at the same time his curse.

The Commanding Officer. After the first night's action in Dhaka on 25–26 March, Lt Col. Muhammad Taj, Commanding Officer of 32 Punjab, remained in Dhaka through the first week in April as Martial Law Administrator of that sector. He then started towards Rajshahi, another major trouble spot, with other units of 57 Brigade under Brigadier Jehanzeb Arbab.[17]

The route followed by Lt Col. Taj was Aricha, Nagarbari, Pabna, Rajshahi. Up to Aricha he met no rebel resistance. At Aricha they had to cross the river. At Nagarbari there was a fight with rebels, but the army soon prevailed. The rebels had cut the asphalted roads up to twenty feet deep and put grass on the top, so they had to advance cautiously, filling up the roads and then proceeding. While Lt Col. Taj was at Nagarbari, others went on to Pabna to secure that town. Later Taj was called to Rajshahi.

Taj says that at Pabna he saw many bodies of men, women and children lying on the road—bodies of non-Bengalis, he said, killed by the Bengali rebels. On the road from Pabna to Rajshahi the Pakistanis were fired upon again. In the ensuing fight the army suffered a couple of casualties. Everywhere they went the non-Bengalis complained about atrocities committed by Bengali rebels.

When he arrived in Rajshahi he went straight to the university, to the loyalist Bengali Vice-Chancellor, Sajjad Hossain, and asked him if there were any 'miscreants' about. The Vice-Chancellor said there were no 'miscreants', but that many non-Bengalis were trapped in a barrack—he gave the location and requested Taj to rescue them. Taj rescued the non-Bengalis, arranged food for them and told them to go home. He said the Vice-Chancellor, Sajjad Hossain, was a 'noble man', whom he held in the highest regard.

Maj. Gen. A.O. Mitha, the legendary founder of the Special Services Group (SSG) of commandos in the Pakistan Army, had been specially recalled to East Pakistan in late March-early April. He has written about an instance when he was flying along the route taken by a brigade, when '...I noticed that in many of the villages near the road, almost all the huts were burnt and there was not a soul in these villages'. When asked about this, the brigadier—Jehanzeb Arbab, moving out of Dhaka into the countryside towards Rajshahi—said that he had faced little resistance, but had 'adopted the method of 'prophylactic fire' by firing 3-inch mortar smoke and high-explosive shells, thus making sure that the villages were not used by the rebels'. He said he had been advised to use these tactics by the Eastern Commander and Governor, General Tikka Khan. General Mitha wrote that General Tikka denied giving any such advice, whereupon he had him come over to the site right then to speak to the brigadier. General Tikka 'gently chided him for using his name and told him not to do it again. I felt Tikka was incapable of giving anyone a rocket'.[18]

According to Brig. (Lt Col.) Taj, during the journey to Rajshahi Brig. Arbab was travelling behind him. Taj said that he and his men from 32 Punjab regiment did not go to Sarda, 18 Punjab did. It was possible Brig. Arbab had gone there too, Taj did not seem sure. Speaking for himself, he said he had not set fire to any village on the way, but could not say what was happening behind him.

As far as Lt Col. Taj could recall, he reached Rajshahi on 13 April. Around 21 or 22 April Lt Col. Rizvi arrived to take charge at Rajshahi and Taj left a couple of days later.[19] Brig. Arbab left Rajshahi earlier than him. Taj recalled that Iqbal Day was celebrated at Rajshahi University, and he, Taj, presided over the event.[20]

The lieutenant. After the military action in Dhaka, this young officer moved with his unit in 18 Punjab to Pabna, Rajshahi and Bogra. 'Penny packets' of 25 Punjab Regiment deployed in this area were in great difficulty and some had been totally eliminated by the rebels.

The Sarda police academy, on the way to Rajshahi, was in rebel hands. When the army arrived there was resistance by the rebels and it took one and a half to two hours of fighting to 'clear' it. Only rifles and light machine guns had been in use—no heavy weapons. The main buildings were secured first—there were some dead bodies there. The officer reckons there were perhaps twenty to twenty-five casualties on the rebel side; sometimes a weapon would be found but no person, so one had no idea whether the rebel wielding the gun had been hit or had escaped unhurt.

Then the officer went to the river bank. It was full of people. Both rebels and villagers had run away to the bank, some had swum to the other side. 'What did you do there?' I asked. 'Nothing', replied the officer. There was no resistance, and he came back after a while.[21]

According to officers of 57 Brigade, the senior officers present at the Sarda police academy when it was recaptured included the Commanding Officer (CO) of 18 Punjab Lt Col. Basharat Sultan, Maj. Madad Hussain Shah (who was commanding A Company and doubling as 2IC (2nd in command) as the original 2IC had had a nervous breakdown after the action in Dhaka), and Maj. Jamil Masood, commanding C Company. They then moved on to Rajshahi, leaving behind B Company under Capt. Muzaffar Aulad Hussain Naqvi.[22]

The lieutenant who had gone to the banks of the Padma by Sarda police academy was adamant that there was no separation of men and women, nor killing of anyone at the river bank, at least while he was there.

Thanapara—The Making of a Massacre

Thanapara was a place condemned by the geography of history. A cartographic scratch in the dying days of empire, by a British judge who had never before been to India, transformed it in 1947 into an international border between implacable enemy-states. In April 1971 its porous boundaries across the seasonally shallow waters of a mighty river made it the meeting point of rebellion, infiltration and repression. Yet the massacre of 13 April was not inevitable.

In a striking confirmation of the army's position in many incidents, the Bengali victims of Thanapara said that the rebel Bengalis started firing first and the

army returned fire. Perhaps if nobody had shot at them in the bazaar, the army units would have marched on its way and not felt the need to scour the villages looking for further signs of 'miscreants'. The rebels also tried to hide themselves by mingling among the villagers, thus putting everyone in the village at even more risk. Indeed there was a touch of resentment even among sympathetic villagers towards the 'freedom fighters' due to their tendency to take potshots at the army without being in a position to really take them on, putting uninvolved civilians at the receiving end of the army's wrath while achieving no lasting military goal.

Thanapara also illustrated the agonising interplay of humanity and inhumanity in the extraordinary circumstances of war. The soldier or officer who took Raihan Ali out of the men's line during the separation of men from the women and children clearly saved his life. He took the trouble of personally pulling him out of that line, presumably because at age twelve he was considered a child—too young to be interrogated and shot. Yet the same man viciously kicked down the man next to Raihan who had mistakenly thought that he was the one being asked to come out of the line. He could have simply ordered the man to sit down, but chose to kick him back in his place. His act of saving the twelve-year-old boy's life then had little to do with respect for human life and dignity, but perhaps more to do with obeying rules—children were exempt, along with women, and Raihan had been sitting in the wrong line.

Yet those at the receiving end of the boot and the bullets testified that not all of the army personnel were cruel—some were visibly distressed, others tried to help the hapless villagers. The soldiers guarding the women and children before they were sent off were described as appearing sorrowful and having tears in their eyes. While one soldier was hostile to Zinnatul Alam 'Jinnah', another soldier or junior officer encouraged him to plead for his life and accompanied him towards the officer-in-charge. The officer at Thanapara personally killed all the assembled male villagers, but another officer who had gone to a similar location a short distance along the river bank killed no one. Later in the year an officer set Raihan free from forced labour at the police academy and reprimanded the soldiers who had brought him there. Abdus Sattar, who survived being shot and set alight by one army officer, had words of praise for another—'Major Shafiullah'—who was posted at the same place later. Curiously, the 'humane' officers are all labelled 'Beluchi', 'Pathan' or 'Sindhi' by the Bengalis, without any obvious evidence regarding their ethnicity—anything but 'Punjabi', it would seem, in the clash of ethno-linguistic identities constructed by the Bengali nationalist movement.[23]

The memories of Thanapara also reveal the deep schism among the Bengalis on the question of nationalism. Not everyone was fighting for secession and a new independent 'Bangladesh'. From the Vice-Chancellor of Rajshahi University to the villagers of Thanapara, there were Bengalis who still believed in a united Pakistan. Local 'Razakars' caught rebels like 'Shibli' and handed them over to the army. A neighbour—termed a 'Razakar'—informed visiting soldiers that Raihan was in his house when he hid from them in the bushes. Many others, like the poor day-labourers of Uyajaan's family, were entirely non-political.

Moreover, army personnel were not the only ones terrorising and killing unarmed people in East Pakistan. Activists of the Awami League were described by the Bengali villagers as being torturers and killers as well. They wanted to kill not only West Pakistani security personnel, such as the trainees at the Sarda police academy who were eventually handed over to the Indian security forces, but also civilian non-Bengalis of East Pakistan, such as the Bihari from Ishwardi who was caught while trying to escape the violence. The Awami Leaguers' way of killing was both incompetent and gruesome—they killed the Bihari by first shooting him, then burying him alive and finally throwing him into the river in a sack. The torture and mutilation of civilian or military victims and the manner of killing them by Bengali nationalists were barbaric, and robbed the pro-liberation side of any moral authority on the question of atrocities.

There is an eerie similarity between what happened in Thanapara and the military action in Dhaka University a couple of weeks before, in the way a few villagers were kept in reserve to stack the dead bodies before being lined up and shot next to the corpses they had just been made to carry. A company of the same regiment, 18 Punjab, had gone to Dhaka University on 25–26 March. 18 Punjab had also gone to Shankharipara in old Dhaka on 26 March. It would be extraordinary if one or two companies of a single regiment were allowed to inflict so much indiscriminate suffering upon non-combatant Bengalis, and lasting damage to the reputation of an entire army and the global standing of a whole nation, with no consequences for the perpetrators. It would be easy for the Pakistan Army to ascertain exactly which officer killed the men assembled at Thanapara and which of his superior officers ordered or encouraged him to do so—if not for anything else, in the army's own interest. After all, some of the people with the keenest interest in the outcome of the probes into the My Lais and Hadithas of counter-insurgency are the great many other officers and soldiers who followed their combat rules under difficult circumstances and did not snap.[24]

Throughout March 1971 the US administration worried about the precarious situation of the small number of West Pakistanis trying to deal with the crisis in East Pakistan. 'What force do they have?' asked Kissinger, chairing a White House meeting on 6 March, as they contemplated a possible declaration of independence by Sheikh Mujib at a major public rally the next day. '20,000 troops', replied Richard Helms, the CIA director, referring to West Pakistani forces who could be counted on to be loyal. 'Would East Pakistan resist?' asked Kissinger, 'What is their population?' 'Seventy-five million', answered Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, 'and they would resist'. Their judgment was that any confrontation would lead to a 'blood-bath with no hope of West Pakistan reestablishing control over East Pakistan'.[25]

In the immediate aftermath of the military action, it seemed as if that judgment had been wrong. 'Well maybe things have changed', mused President Nixon on the telephone with Kissinger on 29 March, 'But hell, when you look over the history of nations, 30,000 well-disciplined people can take seventy-five million any time. Look what the Spanish did when they came in and took the Incas and all the rest. Look what the British did when they took India'. 'That's right', agreed Kissinger. 'To name just a few', added the President. 'Well in those cases the people were more or less neutral', said Kissinger, trying to inject a note of caution into the conversation.[26]

One of the results of a force of a few thousands trying to control a land of seventy-five million people was that young officers in combat areas found themselves playing God—with the power to decide who among those before them would live and who would die. Perhaps the officer in Thanapara who spared the life of Muhammad Zinnatul Alam 'Jinnah' after hearing his prayer did so for no other reason but that the single act of granting the gift of life endowed him with a greater sense of power than the deaths of all those he had shot to kill.

6

HOUNDING OF HINDUS

THE POLITICS OF MINORITY PERSECUTION

'... we realized that the term 'genocide' was not appropriate to characterise all killings of Muslim Bengalis. On the other hand, 'genocide' struck us as applying fully to the naked, calculated and widespread selection of Hindus for special treatment'.

– Archer Blood, US Consul-General in Dhaka, 1971[1]

'They did not shoot us because we were Hindu, but because we were their enemy; we were going to return, and we were not going to return empty-handed'.

– Nitai Gayen, survivor of army attack on male Hindu refugees in Chuknagar, 20 May 1971[2]

By the banks of the river Bhadra, at the border of Khulna and Jessore districts, there is a little place called Chuknagar. In May 1971 it became a transit point for Hindu refugees from the surrounding area fleeing westwards to India. Hindu villagers from Khulna district would travel by country boats (*noukas*) to Chuknagar, from where they went by road to the Indian border.

On 20 May 1971, thousands of refugees in transit were milling about the river bank and bazaar at Chuknagar—arriving by boat, selling off the boat and extra belongings at a pittance to the local (Muslim) villagers or simply abandoning them, squatting down to cook and eat a meal before setting off on foot towards India, carrying what little of their possessions they could. As many eye-witnesses described it to me, the place resembled a '*mela*' (fair).[3]

According to the survivors and eye-witnesses, a small group of soldiers arrived in Chuknagar in about three pick-up trucks and started shooting all the adult men among the refugees. At the end of the attack countless dead and dying littered the river bank. Some of the survivors carried on towards India, others returned to the villages they were fleeing from. The residents of Chuknagar—predominantly Muslim—disposed of the bodies by throwing them into the Bhadra river.

In the pretty villages of Khulna I talked to the Hindu survivors of the Chuknagar carnage. Some had just passed through the transit point before the soldiers arrived; some were attacked on the road to India; others had gone on to India after the attack in Chuknagar and returned after Bangladesh became independent; yet others had turned back and returned to their villages. There were women who had lost their husbands, sons and other male relatives at Chuknagar; there were men who had survived.

At Chuknagar new structures had come up extending the bazaar area towards the river bank, changing the site somewhat, but otherwise the scene by the river bank was unchanged. A lone *nouka* was tethered where dozens had jostled on that day, and the river Bhadra flowed along, having long since washed away the bodies. I interviewed local residents, including a Muslim boatman who had been made to go around with the killing party and was among those who had disposed of the bodies after the killing.

The local Awami League politician was aggrieved that Chuknagar had found no place in the official history of Bangladesh and aimed to establish it as the 'largest mass killing' of 1971.[4] Curiously, other villagers told me his uncle had been a leading pro-regime 'Razakar' at the time of the attack and probably instrumental in the military coming to Chuknagar in the first place. There seemed to be no agreement whether the shooting party had come from the direction of Satkhira or Jessore—the road to Chuknagar is such that they could have come from either direction. No one was sure of the reason for the arrival of the army either, except that someone from among the local residents of Chuknagar had clearly informed the soldiers of the refugees' presence there.

Ambush at Jhaudanga

Jhaudanga is further west from Chuknagar, towards the Indian border. Some refugees who had already passed through Chuknagar were attacked that morning on the road near Jhaudanga, so possibly the same group of soldiers went on to Chuknagar.

Taradasi Bairagi. Taradasi Bairagi of Bolaboni village was on the road to India on 20 May 1971 with her husband, three sons, her *debar* (younger brother-in-law), his wife and their two children. I asked why they were leaving their village. 'Oppression', she said. 'Oppression by whom?' I asked. Taradasi glanced around. We were in a courtyard in another village, surrounded by (mostly Muslim) villagers. '*Bairer miyan-ra*' (Muslims from outside the village), she said quickly, before launching back into her story.

Taradasi is a Hindu. She still lives in Bangladesh, a predominantly Muslim country where Islam is the state religion. In 1971, driven out by the harassment by '*bairer miyan-ra*'—fellow villagers who were also Bengali, but Muslim—she and her family took the boat to Chuknagar. Then they walked along the road towards India, joining the tide of refugees who were fleeing East Pakistan.

At a place called Jhaudanga, Taradasi says some army men got down from their vehicles and shot at the band of refugees. They targeted the men. Taradasi's husband, Kalipada Bairagi, her eldest, teenaged son Ramesh, and her brother-in-law Binoy Bairagi were shot and killed.

When Taradasi eventually returned, she found a house emptied of its belongings. Of her two remaining sons, one lives in Bangladesh, while the other works in India.

Moyna Mistry. Moyna Mistry of Hatbati village was leaving her village too, with her husband and father-in-law. They too took the boat to Chuknagar and then walked along the road towards India. Moyna recalls a bend in the road when they encountered the soldiers. The soldiers picked out the men, who dived into the fields. People who ran were shot at. Her husband, Sharat Mistry, was killed. She lost her father-in-law, Giridhari Mistry, in the confusion, but saw him again in India.

Moyna eventually returned to a broken and looted house. A teenaged brother of hers, Chaitanya, had not been hit by the bullets. Moyna now lives with her brother, but told me with great pride that she works for her own living.

Massacre at Chuknagar

Latika Gayen. Latika Gayen is from Dauniyaphand village. We sat on the steps to the *dawa* (open verandah) of her house as she reminisced about 20 May 1971. She and her husband Ishwar Gayen, their four sons, elder daughter-in-law, two grandsons and a daughter were in Chuknagar that morning, on their way to India. They were sitting at the river bank, near a banyan tree. Her elder son Binoy was about twenty-three years old.

Latika managed to get to the point of her story when the soldiers shot her husband right next to her. But she broke down completely as she remembered her eldest son killed in front of her eyes. Thirty-three years had not eased the pain of this mother's loss. Her widowed daughter-in-law came quietly and joined us, having finished her *puja*.

Nitai Gayen. Nitai Gayen is a Hindu male who escaped the killers of Chuknagar on 20 May 1971. A relative of Ishwar Gayen, Latika Gayen's husband, Nitai was about twenty to twenty-two years old in 1971 and had started out on the journey towards India a day later than most of his family as there had not been enough boats. Nitai said that Hindus had been fleeing from the area for two weeks. The reason for the exodus was harassment and looting by 'a certain class of people'—which upon probing again translated into local Bengali Muslims—who would raid Hindu areas in mobs armed with *lathis* (sticks) and *ram-das* (large curved sickles).

There had been sporadic conflicts with the armed forces in the area before the Chuknagar incident. In late April the army had shelled a nearby school, the Chakrakhali Secondary School (which was being used by rebels for resistance, I was told). In May there was a shooting incident at the nearby village of Badamtola, in which Nitai's uncle was injured, and a house which I had visited in that village was set on fire. After that incident everyone had left.

Nitai arrived in Chuknagar around 9.30 or 10.00 in the morning of 20 May. He was just about to set off on the road journey towards the Indian border when the shooting started from the direction of the *pucca* (asphalted) road which they were to take. According to Nitai Gayen there were three trucks of soldiers, maybe fifty to sixty men in total. There were a few unarmed Biharis with them. He thought they came from the direction of Jessore. One group of soldiers went by boat to the north bank of the river.

Nitai ran back to his family. He left the old people where they were, as he thought the soldiers would only kill young men. But he told his cousin Ranjit, his nephew Binoy and another nephew, Dhiren, to run for it. Nitai himself ran into the mosque, where local Muslims were loudly reciting the Quran to demonstrate that they were Muslims. He wrapped himself in a *madur* (bamboo mat) and a woman from the village sat on it.

From his hiding place, Nitai could see his family. He said he saw three soldiers go up to them, put their rifles to the forehead of his father, *kaka* (father's younger brother), *pishey* (father's sister's husband) and older brother Ishwar, and shoot them all. At this point his nephew Binoy and cousin Ranjit came

running out of wherever they had been hiding and grabbed the soldiers. A scuffle broke out. One *jethaima* (aunt, married to father's older brother) clasped hold of a soldier, saying *maren na, maren na* (don't kill, don't kill). One soldier got control of his rifle again and shot Binoy, another one shot Ranjit and then also shot the aunt—out of anger, Nitai thinks, because she had got hold of him and tried to stop him. He didn't see Dhiren any more—he was probably killed by the trunk of the banyan tree along with some other people.

In Nitai's estimation the shooting seemed to go on for three or four hours. According to him there were probably a total of 8,000–10,000 people in the area. The soldiers targeted adult men. Nitai told me that he did not see any molestation or abduction of women by army personnel, nor did he hear of any molestation of women by the army in his many trips back to Chuknagar since then.

After it was all over, he first moved the surviving members of the family by boat to a place further east, that is away from the direction of the Indian border. Then he came back to the corpses at Chuknagar. He found Rs. 2000 and 3–4 *bhori* of gold in his nephew Binoy's pocket. In an attaché case belonging to an unknown dead man he found Rs. 8,000–10,000. He tried to drag the bodies to the river, but was unable to do so. Local people were looting the belongings of the dead, while some of the injured were still groaning. Some people had died of drowning as well.

On the way back Nitai saw a man diving repeatedly into a shallow pond. He said he was trying to die as all his family was dead. Nitai told him to go to India, take some training, avenge the killing of his family and then die. The man stopped diving and went away.

Among the corpses Nitai saw a baby, still alive, suckling its mother. The parents were dead. He brought the baby back to his boat. It was crying. A woman in another boat asked him to check if the baby had a scar on its forehead—it did. It turned out the woman was the sister of the dead mother; they were from Mothbaria in Barisal. Nitai gave her the baby. At this point of his story, the normally calm and composed Nitai Gayen wept.

Shailendra Nath Joardar. Shailendra Nath Joardar (Shailen) is a Hindu from the village of Kathamari. He is a survivor of the Chuknagar massacre.

In 1971 Shailen was about eighteen or nineteen years old. His father had passed away; he lived with his mother, a brother and a sister. His father had been a farmer—they owned a little bit of land, the rest was farmed on the basis of share-cropping.

According to Shailen, the Muslims in the village of Halia, on the other side of the river from Kathamari, started looting Hindu areas in 1971. The Hindus of Halia then came over to Kathamari. They reported that the Muslims were looting their property and trying to abduct their women. For a while the Hindus tried to set up a system of guard duty in their areas. But within a short time they decided to leave East Pakistan and go to India.

Shailen knew no one in India. He and his family went by boat to Chuknagar via Dumuria, arriving in Chuknagar on the morning of 20 May. The boat was their own boat—they had to leave it there. The local Muslims took the boat and everything in it—according to Shailen some paid a little money, some didn't.

Many people were sitting and eating at the river bank, there was hardly space to sit. Shailen and his family also sat down and had a meal. Just as they were about to start walking, someone warned them to get away as the military were coming. They heard shots, first in the distance, then closer. People started running, swimming in the river. Shailen was in the bazaar with several others when he saw two men in 'khaki' uniform coming towards the market, shooting with their rifles. He fled towards the river. The older people told them not to run, but Shailen didn't listen. He jumped into the river and hid behind some boats. Then he thought he might still be visible from the side of the boats, so he dived below the water and started to swim. As he came up to breathe, a bullet whizzed past his ear. He dived under water again. When he came up again a second shot missed him. But the third shot hit him on the right elbow, fracturing the bone—Shailen showed me the scar. The river was flowing in the direction they had come from. After a while Shailen was out of range of the shooting.

Eventually he came ashore and collapsed amidst many dead bodies. He lay there all night. At dawn a local Muslim lady saw that he was alive and got some people to carry him to her home where she treated his wound with roots. In the meantime, his mother, brother and sister had survived the shooting and gone towards Jessore. The next day they came back, having lost him and found no other travelling companion. At Chuknagar they were told that a boy from Kathamari was being treated for his wounds in one of the village houses, and found him. While they had survived, Shailen later learned that an elder sister's husband and father-in-law had been killed. He stayed in the house in Chuknagar for a week before returning to Kathamari.

His brother was about ten to twelve years old and had not been killed. The older men who had told him not to run were all dead. Only the women were

left. Their village was empty. So they went to another Hindu village nearby called Kholsebuniya, where there were a few more people, and remained there for the rest of the year. Life was hard, they had to live on charity. But, Shailen said, the price of rice was low.

A 'Razakar'[5] force was formed in the area later. They used to threaten the Hindus and accuse them of harbouring Indians. Shailen would hide in the bushes if they appeared in the neighbourhood. In a nearby village a couple of Hindus were picked up and killed by the 'Razakars', but according to Shailen this was due to personal enmities and had nothing to do with politics.

Shailen never saw the military again. When he returned to his own village he found that everything had been looted. In later discussions people in the area speculated that the local (Muslim) residents of Chuknagar had called in the military on 20 May in order to loot the money and jewellery being carried by the (Hindu) refugees who were fleeing to India.

Muhammad Wajed Ali. Muhammad Wajed Ali and his brother Sher Ali, both Muslim residents of Chuknagar, were among those who disposed of the corpses on 20 May 1971 by throwing them into the river.

Wajed Ali is a simple boatman. According to him, a red jeep came in the morning to the bazaar where he and other local Muslims were sitting. The men in the vehicle had asked where the '*malayun*' (Hindus) were. He and the other Muslims had started to shout '*naraye takbir...*' to demonstrate that they were Muslims.

Later two vehicles of soldiers came. Here Wajed Ali made a rather perplexing distinction: he insisted, '*Khansena-ra ektao guli korey nai, Bihari military guli korse*'. (The Pakistani army did not do any shooting, the Bihari military did it)

The local Awami League politician and his retinue of men scoffed at this, but Wajed Ali was emphatic on the point. According to him the people who had come in the red jeep earlier that day, asking about Hindus, had been '*Khansena*' (Pakistan army), but those who came to do the killing were different somehow—'Bihari military', as he put it.[6]

Whoever they were, by Wajed Ali's description they laid the place to waste. After the shooting stopped and the killers departed, Wajed and others were asked by Wahab, the *chacha* (uncle) of the present Awami League politician, to throw all the bodies into the river. According to Wajed Ali, Wahab promised Wajed and the others that they would be paid Rs. 4,000 for disposing of the bodies; they could also keep some of the money and valuables they found on

the bodies. Wajed and his brother tied ropes to the feet of the bodies and dragged them to the river. According to Wajed the pair of them carried 'hundreds' of bodies for hours—they stopped counting after a while. In the end, they were paid only Rs. 2,000. However, the two brothers did find some booty from the dead bodies—Rs. 8 lakh (800,000) and 4 kilos of gold, according to Wajed. This claim elicited another round of scoffing from the others present during this conversation. Whatever amount of gold it was, Wajed sold it to a local person who promised to pay Rs. 1,200 for it but actually paid only Rs. 500. As for the '8 lakh rupees', he gave it to the local Awami League man called Haider, who told him after a while that because of a bank robbery all the notes had been taken out of circulation, so that the money Wajed had deposited with him was worthless.

I interviewed Wajed Ali again the following year in another village, away from the local politicians of Chuknagar. His story remained unchanged. He was adamant that it was not the '*Khansena*' (Pakistan Army), but 'Bihari military' that had done the killing at Chuknagar. He repeated that he and his brother had recovered 8 lakh rupees and 4 kilos of gold from the corpses they had dragged to the river. Somewhere deep down he appeared to suspect that he had been deceived by the people to whom he had handed over the cash and gold he had found on the bodies—he spoke about how the two men concerned had suffered painful or disturbed deaths, with veiled hints that this was perhaps divine punishment for cheating the poor.

Muhammad Wajed Ali said that all the corpses he and his brother had dragged to the river had been men. There was not a single woman or child. He had found one injured woman who had been hit on the shoulder by a bullet. Her name was Shefali. He said he considered her his *dharma-bon* (sister) and she sent him *dawat* (invitations) for special occasions.

Contemplating Chuknagar

Given the number of eye-witnesses and surviving relatives of those killed, there is no doubt that a major massacre, targeted to kill adult Hindu males, took place in Chuknagar on 20 May 1971. Every other aspect of the Chuknagar killing, however, remains shrouded in uncertainty.

To begin with, it seems to have been a one-off incident; Nitai Gayen had never heard of any other instance of this type of killing of refugees that he experienced in Chuknagar. Neither had Achintya Saha, another Hindu who had passed through Chuknagar with his family earlier that very day. Both calm

and thoughtful men, they contemplated the killings in Chuknagar and the conflict of 1971 with none of the mindless hate or hysteria frequently found among those who had seen less and suffered little. Achintya, a 'reformed' Marxist and my guide and mainstay in many of the Khulna villages, also had a delightful wry sense of humour and an idealistic habit of contesting elections in Bangladesh.

Everyone I spoke to in the area believed that someone from Chuknagar had informed the army and led them there that day, but the motive for the killing was unclear. Thousands of refugees had been passing through Chuknagar for some time, and nobody had bothered about it till that day. If the regime wanted to purge the province of Hindus, why not let the refugees go to India? As the testimonies make clear, local Bengali Muslims were driving out their Hindu fellow-villagers for precisely that purpose, often with an eye to gaining materially from the exodus. The local Muslims at Chuknagar were profiting from the flight of Hindus too, from the business of ferrying people, and from the distress sales of abandoned goods of the refugees. The attack ended the refugee flow and actually made many of the survivors return to their villages.[7]

As Shailen Joardar pointed out, the Hindus speculated later that local Bengali Muslims had got the army to come and attack them in order to loot the cash and jewellery that they were carrying. In other words, one possible motive for the attack was sheer banditry. If Nitai Gayen found Rs. 10,000 in one dead man's case, it is not impossible that Wajed Ali the corpse-bearer and his brother had found 'lakhs' of rupees and kilos of gold from the 'hundreds' of bodies they claim to have carried to the river. However, those who did the killing did not do the looting. The attackers were uniformed outsiders who did the killing and left; the looters were locals. The motive of the killers, therefore, is not explained by the looting that followed.

Nor can the killing simply be termed 'genocide' against all Hindus, as suggested by US Consul-General Blood, as there was a further selection of only adult males as targets. Indeed, Blood's information at the time confirmed the same pattern in villages—'we had been receiving numerous accounts... which suggested a common pattern of Army operations whereby troops entered a village, inquired where the Hindus lived, and then killed the male Hindus. There appeared to be little, if any, killing of Hindu women and children'.[8] Blood also confirmed the widespread anti-Hindu attitude of Bengali Muslims.

Nitai Gayen—the Hindu male survivor of Chuknagar—may have been closer to the truth when he told me, 'They did not shoot us because we were

Hindu, but because we were their enemy; we were going to return, and we were not going to return empty-handed'.

Blood observed, '... the evidence seemed to suggest that the Pakistani military were unable to make a distinction between Indians and East Pakistani Hindus. Both were treated as enemies'.[9] In other words, the military regime seemed to be using the religious affiliation of being a Hindu as proxy for the political category of 'secessionist', and all Hindu males of an adult age had in effect been declared real or potential 'enemy combatants'.

There is no way of ascertaining the exact number of people killed in Chuknagar that day, especially as the targets were all refugees in transit and not from Chuknagar itself. However, the attempt by some Bangladeshis—local political aspirants as well as Dhaka University academics—to establish the incident as the 'largest mass killing' of 1971, with the attendant claims that twenty-five to thirty soldiers armed only with their personal weapons killed 10,000 people in a morning's expedition, are unhelpful obstacles to chronicling what was clearly a major massacre.

What is interesting about the numbers is that while estimates of the dead range wildly in various accounts, the number of the killers is consistent—they were very few, according to all accounts, some say twenty to twenty-five or even fewer. They arrived in Chuknagar in about three vehicles. Also consistent is the evidence that the attackers were lightly armed, carrying only their personal weapons. Given the type of weapon and extra ammunition typically carried by a soldier at the time, a band of thirty soldiers would not have more than about 1,200 bullets to use in total. Not all of the bullets would hit their targets and not each hit would kill—for instance, at least three bullets were fired at Shailen Joardar, of which two missed and the third hit his arm. However, by this estimation several hundred people might be hit before the attackers ran out of ammunition.

Another peculiarity is the ratio of the estimated number of refugees to the number of killers. Even if the more fanciful claims are set aside, judging by the topography of the river bank and bazaar several thousand people could have been there on the morning of 20 May 1971. Achintya Saha, who passed through Chuknagar that morning just before the shooting, estimated from his experience of political rallies that there were about 5,000 people in the area; there may have been more if there were people in the hinterland beyond the range of visibility. The greater proportion of the refugees would have been women and children. Even if a third were men, there were thousands of adult men among the refugees as opposed to perhaps twenty-five to thirty soldiers,

who came into their midst in small groups of twos and threes, picking out the men while sparing the women and children. If even a small fraction of the male refugees had attacked the soldiers, the soldiers would have been disarmed and very likely lynched. But no one appears to have resisted. Nitai Gayen agreed with this point. Except for his cousin Ranjit and nephew Binoy, he saw no one resisting or trying to snatch the guns from the attackers. Perhaps it was the surprise, the panic, or the fact that the refugees were strangers to one another that prevented collective action on their part.

Finally, it is unclear from available evidence who exactly the killers were. I asked several officers of the Pakistan army who had served in the Jessore-Khulna area in May 1971 about Chuknagar. They included Brig. Muhammad Hayat, the brigade commander of 107 Brigade based at Jessore cantonment, Col. (Maj.) Samin Jan Babar of 22 Frontier Force and Lt Gen. (Lt) Ghulam Mustafa of 55 Field Regiment. None of them had heard of the Chuknagar incident. They accepted from the evidence I presented that a major killing appeared to have taken place there, but also felt, plausibly, that if others from their unit had done this they would have heard about it at some point. But if these units did not do the Chuknagar killing, somebody in the Satkhira-Jessore area certainly did. It is within the armed forces' power to ascertain who did. That would be in the interests of justice—not only for the individual victims of Chuknagar, but the army itself. For by the massacre of unarmed and helpless Hindu refugees at Chuknagar, a band of twenty-five to thirty men brought lasting disgrace to an entire army and a whole nation.

7.

HIT AND RUN

SABOTAGE AND RETRIBUTION

'The big operations are always done by the Indians... And then they call it a Mukti Fauj "victory". It isn't that we are ungrateful. But it is our war and our land, we want to do it ourselves'.

– Bengali volunteer to the rebel cause, to British-Bengali journalist of *The Guardian*, August 1971[1]

'The propaganda machine worked hard and to good effect. Dressed in a lungi and rifle in hand, the Mukti Bahini guerilla became an instant hero... The news-hungry press swallowed claims of fictitious successes which were widely believed'.

– Maj. Gen. Lachhman Singh, Indian Army[2]

'Indian units were withdrawn to Indian territory once their objectives had been brought under the control of the Mukti Bahini—though at times this was only for short periods, as, to the irritation of the Indians, the Mukti Bahini forces rarely held their ground when the Pakistani army launched a counterattack'.

– Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India and the Creation of Bangladesh*[3]

'Bangladesh appears, at this stage, to have waged one of the weakest—and perhaps shortest—revolutionary wars on record', wrote Peter Kann in a strikingly accurate and prescient analysis in the *Wall Street Journal* on 21 April 1971. 'In less than one month, with fewer than 50,000 men and limited firepower

and air support, the army has been able largely to subdue, for the time being, seventy-five million hostile Bengali people'. But Kann went on: 'This isn't to say the cause of Bangla Desh is finished. But if East Pakistan is ever to be independent, it won't happen through the kind of spontaneous-combustion revolution of the past four weeks. Liberation will be won over years, not weeks; by more action and less rhetoric; with guerilla tactics, not conventional combat; and perhaps by militant leftists rather than idealistic moderates. Much will also depend on India...'[4]

In May 1971 the military authorities allowed a small group of foreign journalists into East Pakistan. 'All Serious Armed Opposition Seems Ended in East Pakistan', reported the *New York Times*.[5] Mort Rosenblum of the Associated Press, filing from Bangkok to evade censorship by the military authorities, described the province as in a state of 'submissive inactivity'.[6] Yet the war was far from over. As Harvey Stockwin of the *Financial Times* wrote, '... Pakistan has not yet spent its urge towards self-destruction. More violence seems certain'.[7]

During the next several months the Pakistani regime failed to find any political solution to the crisis and its army in East Pakistan found itself mired in an unending series of harassments from Bengali rebels, with increasing direct involvement of India which ended in all-out war between the two countries. This chapter depicts the cases of some of the 'underground' fighters for Bangladesh's liberation and the response of some of the army units in a long war of attrition.

Portrait of an Artist as a Rebel Fighter

Abul Barq Alvi is an artist. Small in stature, soft-spoken and kindly in manner, he would seem a most unlikely candidate to be an armed rebel fighter. Yet that is what he was in 1971, one of the many young Bengali men who decided to fight for an independent Bangladesh, went across the border to India to train in the ways to wage war, and returned to gather vital information or conduct acts of sabotage. I met him at his home in the Dhaka University campus where he is professor at the Institute of Fine Arts.[8]

The military regime was also taken in by Abul Barq Alvi's appearance—they captured him, but Alvi managed to talk himself out of custody. As he lived to tell the tale, Abul Barq Alvi is a living insight into what is probably the most romanticised part of Bangladesh's independence movement—the idealistic youth who volunteered to become underground 'guerrilla' fighters for the cause

of independent Bangladesh, where they trained, what missions they undertook, their successes and failures, how they got caught, and what happened to them in captivity.

Abul Barq Alvi told me that he was not particularly active politically before 1971, but, perhaps like youth all over the world, was influenced by Leftist political ideas. He drew posters and pamphlets. He had a job at the department of film and publications. In May 1971 he crossed over the Comilla border to India, ending up eventually in a training camp at Melaghar, in the state of Tripura in India.

Alvi got caught during his fourth visit to Dhaka on a mission from India. On earlier occasions he had come to gather information and maps, or take back 'donations' raised for the refugees. But in August, he and his group came to Dhaka with what he described as a 'large amount' of arms and ammunitions. There were three others with him—Bakr, Fateh Ali and Kamal. Bakr was the leader of the group. They carried 5 SLRs, an equal number of sten-guns, ten grenades, five or six boxes of ammunition and a large quantity of explosives.

The plan had been to meet at a prearranged place in two or three days, to discuss the next phase of action. However, when Bakr, the leader, failed to show up at the appointed place, Alvi decided to return to Melaghar. Altaf Mahmood, a well-known music director of Dhaka, had asked Alvi to take a friend of his over to India, so on 29 August, Alvi went to Mahmood's house to talk it over. It got late. Mahmood's house was opposite the Rajarbag police lines. Alvi was supposed to stay at Fateh Ali's place that night, but Mahmood and his family did not want him to leave so late at night. So he stayed over.

Altaf Mahmood was the composer of the popular Bengali song, '*Amar bhayer roktey rangano ekushe February, ami ki bhulitey pari*', recalling 21 February, the date of commemoration of the language rebellion in East Pakistan. His wife, Sara Ara Mahmood, has written that Mahmood worked with the '*Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra*' ('Free Bengal radio station'). Muktijoddha fighters would come to visit him and quite a lot of arms were buried in their house.[9] It is a hallmark of a certain naivety in these idealistic volunteers in what they perceived as a freedom struggle that someone like Mahmood would work for the then clandestine radio, harbour rebel fighters and even hide arms in his own house, and then simply continue to live there until, inevitably, there came a knock on the door.

The knock came on 29–30 August, when Abul Barq Alvi was staying over. It was very early in the morning. The house was surrounded by soldiers, banging on the door. Altaf Mahmood opened the door himself. Soldiers poured in.

They asked for him by name—'Altaf Mahmood, the music director'. Everyone was rounded up, every room was searched. The soldiers brought out from their vehicle another person (whom Alvi says others recognised as a Mr Samad), and he and Mahmood were taken to the back of the house from where a large trunk full of arms was dug up. Clearly someone in the chain had given the game away. All the men in the house—Alvi, Mahmood and his four brothers-in-law, two others from the next house and three more from the flat above—were arrested and taken to the MP hostel on Airport Road which was serving as the Martial Law court.[10] Alvi says everyone was beaten about while the raid was going on and upon arrival at the hostel.

In the little room where they were all put, Alvi recognised some of the other prisoners—his childhood friend Jewel (a well-known sportsman), Rumi (son of Jahanara Imam), Chullu (who was charged but not killed), Velayet, Azad and so on. He got to know the others while he was there. There were several male relatives of rebels, all swept up in the net.[11] They were called one by one for interrogation in the next room. Sometimes the door was half open. The cries of the prisoners as they were beaten and tortured could plainly be heard.

In Alvi's view, the torture was so bad that anyone who knew anything was bound to let it all out. Certainly, from his account and those of others, it seems that the authorities caught entire groups of infiltrated rebels operating in Dhaka and knew all about their activities. But not everyone buckled under the beating. Altaf Mahmood, the music director, was one who was not singing. Alvi heard him admit only to keeping the trunk full of arms, at the request of a friend. He was returned in a bloodied state.

At one point the guard called for 'Alvi'. This alarmed Alvi considerably, as no one was supposed to know his name just from being picked up at Mahmood's house. Someone had obviously told the interrogators about him. He was asked when he had entered from India, who else was with him, which weapons he had brought and where he had kept them. Alvi replied that he had never been to India. He was beaten, but stuck to the denial. But his questioner told the guards to bring in Bakr, and rattled off to Alvi the names of the four of them who had come together and a list of all the arms they had brought. Clearly one or more of the others had been caught and given everything away, but Alvi continued to deny his involvement. Bakr was brought in—the reason for his absence at the meeting point now obvious. He was only asked to identify Alvi, which he did, nodding his head.

At this point in our conversation Abul Barq Alvi's voice became particularly gentle—he said he felt no resentment towards Bakr for giving everything away,

the poor fellow had been unable to bear the torture. This was extraordinarily generous towards a man who by his admissions and identification of Alvi had virtually signed his death warrant. Alvi never saw Bakr again.

All seemed lost, but Alvi persisted in his denial. He said he had never seen Bakr in his life, Bakr must be mistaken or saying whatever was asked of him to save himself. At this he was tortured more, offered rewards, threatened with death, and when nothing worked, the officer crumpled up the piece of paper in front of him and threw it into a corner in frustration. Alvi was taken off to another room and tortured in a way he says he is unable to describe, except to say that he was completely bloodied and felt like his jaw and fingers were all broken. Nobody had anything to eat or drink throughout this period, but one slightly older soldier—maybe a 'subedar major', Alvi thought—secretly brought the prisoners a few pieces of bread and a bit of sugar. Alvi thinks this man was a 'Beluch'.[12]

Late at night the prisoners were all taken to Ramna police station in a bus.[13] There he registered his name as 'Syed Abul Barq', leaving out 'Alvi'. The other prisoners looked after the newcomers, producing medicines and food. He discussed his situation with Altaf Mahmood and others, learning the names of Mahmood's relatives, as the only explanation for his presence in his house would be to pretend to be a visiting relative himself.

The next day they were back in the MP hostel, but in a different building. People were being called to a room according to reports. Altaf Mahmood and his relatives were all called together. Seizing the opportunity, Alvi asked why he had not been called. He was asked his name, and replied, 'Syed Abul Barq'. Clearly there was no report under that name. He was asked why he had been brought in. Alvi innocently said that he had come to visit Mahmood and had been brought along with the rest of the family. He was now interrogated together with Mahmood and his family. The interrogators were different and seemed more senior officers. Some of them were sympathetic to him, as he looked small and young and had been beaten so much. They asked him to name a few rebels, who were all his age after all. But Alvi claimed he worked every day and so could not say who the rebels were. He was asked the phone number of his office and gave it, praying that whoever answered would back up his claim of attendance. Just as it looked as if the ruse had worked, the soldier who had been present when Bakr had identified him the previous day, during the subsequent beating, and given them the bread, entered the room. For a moment Alvi thought all was lost. But the soldier said nothing.

Alvi was made to swear upon the Quran that he had never been to India and knew no rebels—he swore, mentally begging forgiveness from Allah for lying. In the evening of 31 August all of them were released, except Altaf Mahmood—he was never seen again. The soldier who had not given him away saw Alvi out of the gates. He patted him on the back and told him to go and see a good doctor.

Ballad of a Tragic Hero

I first heard about Rumi in the United States from Zafar Ahmed, a friend of his family, who also recommended *Ekattorer Dinguli* (Those Days of 1971), the book written by Jahanara Imam, Rumi's mother. I read the book in one sitting. Written in diary style, it is one of the most moving accounts of 1971.[14] It starts on 1 March and ends on 17 December 1971. When the diary begins Jahanara Imam's household consisted of her husband Sharif, father-in-law, and two sons—Rumi and Jami. By the time it ends, Rumi, captured on 29 August, had become one of the countless 'disappeared' of 1971, and Sharif Imam had died of a heart attack three days before Bangladesh became independent.

The story of Rumi is a classic Bengali tragic romance. It bears a strong resemblance to a tradition of stories of similarly motivated idealistic young men and women who became underground revolutionaries against British rule. Growing up in Calcutta, I read a fair amount of the popular literature on these rebels. Jahanara Imam refers to her son and his rebel friends as '*bichchhus*'—an untranslatable Bengali endearment for children, loosely meaning 'the little rascals'. In Imam's account the '*bichchhus*' hoarded explosives at home since early March, disappeared to 'go to war', and proved their presence occasionally later in the year with a bomb here, or a shooting there, in a never-ending series of harassment and sabotage of the enemy. Many Bangladeshi accounts also refer to the rebels as '*Bangla'r damal chhele*'—or 'Bengal's indomitable boys', in the sense of patriotic 'naughtiness'. The terms used are the same as in the stories about anti-British revolutionaries, as are the breathless accounts of their 'heroic' exploits of sabotage and assassinations and all too frequent tragic death. In one of Jahanara Imam's diary entries, the night before an abortive trip to cross the border into India, she strokes her son's hair at bedtime as Rumi whistles the tune of *Ekbar biday dao ma, ghurey ashi*—a song associated in Bengali nationalist mythology with Khudiram Bose, the first Bengali militant rebel hanged by the British in 1908.

In reality, after weeks of abortive attempts, Rumi finally managed to set off for India on 14 June. By his mother's account, he joined the rebel Bengali army

officer Maj. Khaled Musharraf near Agartala, in the state of Tripura, and trained as a 'guerrilla'. In July a request arrived from Khaled Musharraf to send a list of all the bridges and culverts of the province. Rumi's father Sharif Imam was involved in getting the list prepared from material from the Roads and Highways division. Other young men also training at Melaghar appeared from time to time with Rumi's news.

Rumi returned home on 8 August. He described life at Melaghar. He had been trained by 'Captain Haider' and he and his group had been sent to Dhaka on some specific work. Haider had been trained in Gen. Mitha's SSG of the Pakistan army. There were apparently nine groups of such 'guerrillas' in Dhaka. Indian army officers are mentioned as supervising the effort. His mother writes that Rumi always wanted to be a 'guerrilla'—he had once wanted to join the Palestine Liberation Organisation!

In the following days, Rumi was often out, but did not appear to be part of the acts of sabotage that were happening in the city. His mother got to meet many of his fellow rebels—Kazi, Alam, Bodi, Swapan, Chullu—as they met at their house many times and ate many a meal she prepared for them. It turned out that their task was to blow up the Siddhirganj power station—but it had impenetrable security. Kazi was the leader of the group and they had been given plenty of armaments to do the job, including rocket launchers. One day they went to check out the area in two boats and the boat in which Kazi, Bodi and Jewel were travelling in encountered the military in another boat. There was a shoot-out, in which Jewel injured his finger. The small incidents of bomb-throwing or shooting that were going on seemed entirely unplanned, opportunistic events—meant to keep up harassment.

On 25 August Rumi finally took part in one of these 'opportunistic' attacks. It seems to have been his first and last. He came home all excited with a couple of his friends and got his mother to drive out to recover the arms they had left in a lane. According to Imam's account, Rumi and his friends had 'hijacked' two cars, and Rumi's group had gone to shoot the police guarding the home of a Chinese diplomat on Street 20 in Dhanmondi, but there were no guards there that evening. So they shot the police guarding a house on Street 18 instead. Kazi, Bodi and Salim did the shooting, while Rumi and Swapan were to act only if the other side responded; they did not. On the way back they ran into a checkpoint and Swapan and Bodi shot two more military police. While getting away, they noticed a jeep following behind them. Finally Rumi got to act—he broke the back window of the car and shot at the jeep, and so did Swapan and Bodi; the jeep hit a lamppost and turned over.

In the next few days, Imam's diary records the endless discussion and excitement over this '*chamakprada*' (thrilling) 'action'. Rumi stayed at home, playing Jim Reeves albums and Tom Jones' *Green green grass of home*, his fellow rebels came for meals and chats. On 29 August, the mother was stroking the son's hair again, while the Khudiram Bose song *Ekbar biday dao ma* played on radio, as if on cue. There was a knock on the door. The military had surrounded the house. A Captain, who Imam wrote looked like a college student, and his Bihari *subedar*, an older man, searched the house and took away all the male residents for questioning.

The next day Jahanara Imam phoned the Capt. and the *subedar* many times for news of her husband and sons, but in vain. In the evening suddenly she got through to the elder officer, who politely said that the interrogation was taking a bit longer and she should not worry. She asked to speak to her husband or sons, and after a moment's hesitation he put her younger son Jami on the phone. She found they had eaten nothing all day and requested the *subedar* to take money from them and buy them some food. The next day she arrived at the MP hostel interrogation centre with clean clothes and a packet of sandwiches. She spotted the *subedar* and got hold of him, asking to see her family. The *subedar* looked very surprised and uncomfortable, but took her to a room where an officer was sitting and spoke to him. Then he told her that her family members were not there, but in the cantonment, and that she should go home. She gave him the packets of clothes and sandwiches to give them—he looked helpless, but accepted them.

A little later everyone except Rumi came home. One boy had been let go the previous day already. They had never been in the cantonment at all. From what they said, Rumi had been identified on the main road by someone in another vehicle and taken in separately by the officer, and identified again when they arrived at the MP hostel. The rest of them had also been beaten up and questioned, in the final stage by a Colonel who is mentioned by everyone who was ever taken to the interrogation centre on Airport Road. Then they were locked up in the small room where they met many others—Bodi, Chullu, Altaf Mahmood and all his relatives, Alvi, Jewel, and others.

It appeared the army had raided nine or ten houses on the basis of good intelligence and caught everybody except Kazi who managed to get away. When Rumi was brought to the small room he confirmed that his questioners already knew who did which 'action', which persons were in which car, how many people they killed. So he proposed to admit his role and told the others from his house to say that they knew nothing of his activities. Altaf Mahmood

said the same to his family members. Jami confirmed that after Jahanara Imam's phone call, the subedar had taken some money from them and brought them some bread and kebabs.[15] Rumi had not been taken to Ramna police station that night with the others. He was never seen again.

Death of a Romance

Rumi's first and last 'action' was on 25 August and he and dozens of others, along with their male relatives, were picked up on 29 August. From the Bengali accounts it is clear that the army raided several houses, including the homes of Altaf Mahmood and Sharif and Jahanara Imam, that night, in a coordinated move based on good intelligence, and that they knew the names of the people they were looking for, the dates they had come into the province from India, the weapons they had brought and where they had hidden them. Clearly the informers were within the rebel groups or their close circles, and this sense of betrayal from within resonates through Imam's book and Sara Ara Mahmood's reminiscences.

However, the stories of the Dhaka rebels, as depicted by Jahanara Imam's book for example, raise several other questions as well. First there is the extraordinary spectacle of Rumi (and his fellow rebels) shooting several police in the heart of Dhaka and then carrying on living at home, chatting excitedly about the 'action' over meals and listening to Jim Reeves. By living at home, getting together there every day and talking about what they had done, they not only risked easy capture, but also put everyone else in the house at risk. The sheer naivety and amateurish attitude demonstrated by this do not match the stories of their having received training as 'guerrillas'.

An even more difficult question is whether Rumi's life, and those of others like him, was worth the 'action' he participated in. It is impossible not to feel the pain of Jahanara Imam at the loss of her son, or the anguish of other wives, sisters, brothers and children. But was Rumi's life worth the overturning of one police jeep, or the shooting of a handful of guards at someone's gate? Would it have been worth his death had Rumi managed to assassinate someone really important? How did this 'action' contribute to the goal of Bangladesh's independence?

Some Bangladeshis told me that the very occurrence of attacks on symbols of the regime, no matter how small, served as inspiration to them in those days. Yet there is something problematic about the very concept of 'individual terrorism' or militant 'revolutionary' activities that involve acts of violence, rel-

evant to Bengali politics since the time of Khudiram Bose's 'martyrdom'—an event used so evocatively in Jahanara Imam's tribute to her son. Khudiram Bose had intended to kill a British judge, but got it wrong. The first Bengali 'martyr' of the strand of 'revolutionary terrorism' in the nationalist movement against British rule was hanged for the murder of two innocent British women.

The use of the legacy of Khudiram Bose in Bangladesh's struggle for independence is curious for another reason too. In the Liberation War Museum in Dhaka there is a list of all the Bengali revolutionary 'martyrs' during British rule; Khudiram Bose's name is at the top of the list. The names are all Hindu. The reason for this may not have been the lack of patriotic enthusiasm on the part of young Muslims, but the very character of the underground militant movement of the time. '... the revolutionary workers in Bengal were drawn from a small spectrum of the population', writes the historian Leonard Gordon, 'They were almost all high-caste Hindus and excluded, for the most part, low-caste Hindus and Muslims.... The Hindu symbolism, rites of initiation drawn from Hindu sects and Hindu beliefs, and especially the conception of the Mother Goddess and the Motherland fused as an object of devotion... must have prevented any kind of Muslim support'. But in another aspect the Dhaka rebels of 1971 seemed to be very much part of Bengal's tradition of conspiratorial militancy: 'The revolutionaries often acted on impulse and emotion without proper plans or precautions and had only short-term goals. The link between specific acts of violence and the independence of India was at best a hazy one'.[16]

Rumi's place as tragic hero in Bangladesh's independence movement is assured more through the moving tribute by his anguished mother than through any specific action of his own. Perhaps it has overshadowed others who managed to stay alive longer, and achieved more in practical terms. The Siddhirganj power station was successfully bombed in November—by others. Yet Rumi is more than just himself—in a way his story symbolises all the young men who volunteered in 1971, who dreamed of becoming 'guerrillas' to fight for freedom. They may have been naïve, but they believed in something—a cause that was noble, and greater than each of their individual parts.

Ironically, those who opposed them also believed in a 'noble' cause—the unity and integrity of their country. One man's freedom fighter is always another man's terrorist. If Rumi thought it was all right to kill a group of gatemen as he considered them his 'enemies' in a war, can the other side be castigated for thinking it was all right to kill 'enemy combatants' like him who had taken up arms to dismember their country?

Custodial violence is a curse that is endemic all over South Asia and infected both sides of the conflict in 1971. Torture is universally and deservedly condemned as an abomination and also considered an unreliable way of procuring information. However, whatever their means, the interrogators in the Martial Law court seemed to have been rather accurate in working out who among the men rounded up from Altaf Mahmood's and Jahanara Imam's houses were active militants and who were not. From the testimony of the pro-liberation Bengali accounts, they do not seem to have kept back anyone who was not really involved. On the other hand, they did err in the opposite direction—Abul Barq Alvi was a rebel who got away.

Sabotage and Retribution

The military authority's response to the increasing incidents of sabotage and harassment was a bewildering range of contradictions. One result of having to police a vast area with a small number of officers while fighting a protracted low-level unconventional war was that very young officers from West Pakistan frequently found themselves in charge of large swathes of territory with responsibilities beyond their age and experience or anything they might have been called upon to do in conventional circumstances. They did not speak the language of the province. They could not tell who among the Bengali East Pakistanis was friend and who was foe, because, naturally, they all looked identical in appearance. They were unfamiliar with the culture and customs. They felt an ever-present threat. They reacted in diverse ways, often depending entirely on the personality and inclinations of a single individual, producing a collective incoherence. For the citizenry, the outcome of any encounter with the regime therefore became a question of sheer luck. The lack of any pattern generated its own form of terror, for anything could happen to anybody at any time.

Aside on Saidpur

Almost all the reminiscences in the 'liberation literature' of Bangladesh are by Bengalis. An exception is a published account by a Marwari businessman of Saidpur, Dwarka Prasad Singhania, containing allegations of looting, forced labour and mass murder against the regime.[17] In this case I was able to interview the then Commanding Officer (CO) of the regiment stationed in Saidpur and compare his responses to Singhania's account.

The looting is alleged to have happened on 27 March 1971. Singhania accuses a large assortment of people—an army captain, a '*havildar* major' and

twelve civilians including the secretary of the 'relief committee', the chairman and vice-chairman of the municipality, the civil administrator of Saidpur, a doctor and an executive of Burmah Shell company—of breaking into their house at five in the morning, beating them up, looting Rs. 60–70,000 and taking away his father Harilal Singhania. The sheer number and range of persons in responsible positions who have been named makes the allegation somewhat incredible and suggests it should have been probed further before publication.

The second allegation is that the army forced many Bengalis and Marwaris to work on Tatgaon bridge and the airfield and, later in June, at the cantonment. Singhania alleges that he was mistreated and accuses two army officers and two civil administrators of trying to get him to sign on blank papers and convert to Islam.

The third and most sensational allegation is that on 13 June 1971, 338 Marwari men, women and children were massacred in a train at Golaghat rail factory. Singhania claims that he was on the train and survived. He writes that the Marwari families had been promised that they were being sent to India and put on a train towards Chilahati (at the Indian border), but that instead the train stopped at Golaghat and was attacked by men wielding spears and *das*. He names several of the attackers, some of them 'Bihari'—peons, *panwalas*, tailors—clearly local people whom he knew. He writes that he and a few others made it to India. While all the attackers he names appear to be local people, he throws in the allegation that the 'police and military' shot at them when they tried to escape.

I put all these allegations to Col. Muhammad Shafi, then CO of 23 Field Regiment stationed in Saidpur.[18] Soft-spoken but firm in his views, Col. Shafi agreed to meet me without any prior introduction and responded directly to each of the allegations made by Singhania. Regarding the looting allegation, he said that he had never heard of such an incident. However, on 27 March, the date of the alleged incident, Col. Shafi had not been in Saidpur—he was called to Rangpur on 25 March and ordered to go to Bogra that night. He did have an officer whose name resembled a name stated by Singhania, but Col. Shafi felt that had an officer—and so many others in the civil administration—been involved in such an incident, it would have been reported to him by someone at some point.

Regarding the allegation of forced labour, Col. Shafi did not recognise the reference to 'Tatgaon bridge'. However, he had plenty to say about constructing the airstrip. He considers the building of the airstrip at Saidpur as a major achievement of his tenure there. At the time, the army was restricted to the

cantonment in Saidpur. It was considered unsafe to go out, and there were no services. The unit felt so isolated that around early April Col. Shafi decided to build an airstrip from scratch at Saidpur. He had neither the technical know-how nor the funds to build one in the conventional way, so he came up with other ideas.

The location selected for the airstrip was a stretch of jungle. Col. Shafi announced that the local people could cut the trees and keep the wood. He told me that people came in droves and the jungle was cleared in a week. This is quite likely as the wood would have been valuable pay in kind. The construction of the airstrip, however, was a different story.

In order to construct the airstrip when there was no cash to pay for the work, Col. Shafi said he made a public appeal to local people to volunteer to build it, arguing that it would be a lasting infrastructure for Saidpur and would put Saidpur 'on the map'. He offered drinkingwater, medical treatment if anyone was injured or ill, and non-stop music from Indian films on a loudspeaker as entertainment. There were three shifts—6 am to 12 noon, 12 noon to 6 pm and 6 pm to midnight—with a couple of thousand men per shift. As there were not enough people from the town he appealed to the rural areas too, offering a train service to take them back and forth from their nearest station. He asked members of local bodies to bring certain numbers of 'volunteers' from their respective areas. He says that people came in their thousands, with their meals of rice packed in a pouch. He met them and talked to them as they worked. He reports with pride that in three and a half to four months, a 300 feet by 3,000 feet airstrip had been completed.

It does not seem to have occurred to Col. Shafi that while people might readily volunteer to cut down the jungle as they had been told they could keep the wood, it was far less likely that thousands would turn up voluntarily to build an airstrip as a 'public good' for their town for no pay. Rather, it is possible that many of the 'volunteers' whom Col. Shafi saw coming to work on the airstrip were actually forced labour, coerced by the very local members to whom Col. Shafi had entrusted the responsibility of bringing in people.

When I put this to Col. Shafi he admitted that it was possible that some of them might have misused his appeal and forced people to come. Nobody had complained to him when he visited the airstrip—but they may have been too afraid to complain to a West Pakistani army officer, especially if threatened by their local strongman. Even the local body members may have taken Col. Shafi's appeal as a 'quota' they were obliged to fill and may have feared the consequences if they failed to produce the requisite number of 'volunteers' from

their areas. In fact, the appeal Col. Shafi made for building the airstrip was clearly open to abuse, especially in the context of insurgency and martial law, and anyone with political antennae would have spotted this easily. The building of Saidpur airport may well have created a long-term asset, but only those who built it can say how many of them had worked voluntarily.

Regarding the most serious allegation, of a massacre of families who had been promised they would be taken to India, Col. Shafi confirmed that such a massacre had taken place, but said that the army had nothing to do with it. He was informed of this 'tragedy' some weeks after it had occurred, he said. The version that he was told was that some local people had promised the few remaining Hindu families that they would be taken by train to India, but instead, near the border the men were killed and the women were told to go across the border.

While this version differs from Singhania's in some details—Singhania says the train stopped at a rail factory and claims women were killed as well—it also corroborates it in important ways. Singhania's account does not name any Pakistan army officers in connection with the train massacre. Rather, it names a number of people who were clearly local Muslims, whether Bengali or Bihari, and the use of spears and the *da*, mentioned by Singhania, is consistent with the ethnic killings among local civilians during the conflict. In this case the motive may have been robbery, as the Marwaris were businesspeople who would be assumed to be carrying money and valuables if they were going to India.

The Tigers of Thakurgaon

When I first read the title of a Bengali article '*Bagher khanchay chhoybar*' (Six times in the tiger's cage) in a collection of memoirs of 1971, I thought the author was referring to being in a Pakistani prison six times. Bengali nationalist accounts usually refer to West Pakistanis in terms of animals, and most of the accounts are written in flowery language in a somewhat melodramatic style. Muhammad Safikul Alam Choudhury, however, was referring to actual tigers.[19]

Safikul Alam claims that he was an organiser of '*sangram parishad*' (struggle committees) in the 'unions' at Saldanga and Pamuli and arranged for military training of youth with rifles taken from Boda police station. He states that he was captured by loyalist 'Razakars' in September 1971. He was taken to Boda police station and then to Thakurgaon cantonment. Among other things, he says he sat on a chair at the police station and was knocked off it by a 'Bihari' police officer who said he was not supposed to sit on a chair.

According to Safikul Alam, over the next several days he was beaten during questioning at Thakurgaon cantonment and lost consciousness, and every time he came to, he found himself in a cage with four tigers. Alam writes that the tigers did nothing to him—in fact, he claims that a baby tiger slept with its head on his feet regularly! However, he writes that one day the military put fifteen people in the tigers' cage and the tigers mauled a dozen of the prisoners. He claims the mauled prisoners were then taken out and shot. He says other prisoners were also periodically brought there and shot, and that a total of 150 persons were shot in this way at the cantonment.

During this time he was allegedly taken to Thakurgaon jail and produced in court where a judge gave him bail, but he was again brought back to the cantonment (and into the tigers' cage). Later he was sent to Thakurgaon police custody, from where he escaped when the Indian army and Mukti Bahini (Bangladeshi liberation force) were advancing in the area.

Safikul Alam's account is implausible in many aspects. No dates are mentioned except his capture on 4 September, and the chronology is foggy. It beggars belief that the tigers would maul everyone else who was put into the cage but never touch Safikul Alam—except to sleep at his feet—even though he was put in there on six different occasions. It is also not clear why those who were allegedly shooting so many other prisoners did not shoot him too.

Safikul Alam names a 'Major Rana' as the officer who questioned him on most occasions. He also mentions a 'Colonel', who enquired if he had any problems, whether he was given food, how much education he had, and told him that he would make a good Muslim out of him and that he should abandon his politics.

A document in the Government of Bangladesh's official compilation of documents on 1971 also refers to a prisoner put in a tigers' cage at Thakurgaon—but it is taken from a Bengali newspaper item from 1972. The prisoner is named as 'Sirajudaulah', a local of Thakurgaon, and the date of his arrest given as July. Curiously, this account also mentions an incident about not being allowed to sit on a chair after arrest. In addition to tigers, a monkey features in this story—brought in to slap the prisoner around. In this account too the prisoner was allegedly put into the tigers' cage more than once, but this account claims the tiger clawed him on one occasion. The account names the interrogator at the cantonment as 'Major Raja'. The prisoner also mentions a meeting with 'the Colonel'—'*onek sodupodesh diye Colonel amakey chhere dilo*' (The Colonel gave me a lot of good advice and let me go).[20]

My research indicated that there was no 'Major Rana' in the unit at Thakurgaon, but there was Major Hafiz Raja of 34 Punjab—who has since died. The

Commanding Officer (CO) of 34 Punjab based at Thakurgaon was Lt Col. Amir Muhammad Khan. I asked him if he was feeding Bengali prisoners to tigers at Thakurgaon cantonment.[21]

Brig. (Lt Col.) Amir Muhammad Khan is a lively person with a sense of humour. He took my questions in a good-natured way, answered them and provided a vivid description of what he was doing in Thakurgaon. He said he arrived in Thakurgaon in July 1971 and inherited two tigers and two cubs that the unit had kept as pets. Someone said they used to be in a circus. My question came as no surprise to him, as he had read in Indian papers after the war that he was accused of throwing Bengali prisoners to tigers. He denied the allegation. According to Amir, what actually happened was that some time in September one Bengali prisoner was not talking, so at one point he himself took him to the tigers' cage and threatened to throw him in. The man still wouldn't say anything, so he let him go.

According to Amir Muhammad Khan this was the sole incident involving the tigers. He categorically denied that prisoners were thrown into the cage and mauled by the tigers. He also said nobody was shot in the cantonment while he was there. However, many Bengalis, including members of the loyalist auxiliary force Al-Badr, were present when he had made the threat about the tigers, and he had also joked about throwing people to the tigers on other occasions, which might have added to the rumour mills. I asked if other officers could have put prisoners in the tigers' cage without his knowledge, but he thought that would not have been possible as his office was close by and as CO he would have come to know about it.

There were a host of other things that Amir did do, however, which would clearly contribute to a rather interesting reputation. He found the people in his area a bit lax in the practice of Islam, so he got them together in a school and made them perform *namaz* (prayers). He found forty temples in the area, some of them abandoned by Hindus who had left, but no mosque—so he had one built. He was invited to senior Bengali administrators' homes and was shocked to find that the women did not wear *dupattas* (scarves), so he ordered a more 'modest' dress code. Finally, after dinner at a Bengali home, he was told there would be music and dance—performed by the host's daughter. This was too much—he was having none of that!

Brig. (Lt Col.) Amir said that other officers did try to explain to him that Bengali culture and customs were rather different from West Pakistan's. He also told me that he was trying to appear stricter than he actually was, in the interest of discipline. I told him I was dubbing him the 'Aurangzeb of Thakur-

gaon' and that if he had stopped Bengalis from singing and dancing he had only himself to blame that people would believe the worst of him! Amir, who had been in the SSG, took the knock with good humour.

Another experience related to me by Brig. Amir, however, was rather more sombre. When he first arrived in Thakurgaon, he had gone to see a house which used to be the home of the local chief of the East Pakistan Civil Armed Forces (EPCAF). This officer and his second-in-command (2IC) had both been West Pakistani. As he entered the house he saw stains on the wall opposite. When he asked for an explanation he was told that in March, Bengali elements of the EPCAF and other local Bengalis had attacked the house and killed Maj. Muhammad Hossain and his wife and son in a most brutal manner. His little daughter had been knifed and thrown on to the road and was missing. Another daughter had been away with the maid and was safe. The 2IC, his wife and a Bengali officer who was trying to take them to safety were also murdered. Lt Col. Amir was told by the local legislator that 3–4,000 Bihari families were left fatherless by the ethnic killing by Bengalis. He set up a camp for the bereaved families and raised money for their rehabilitation. Amir told me that he tried to recover the missing baby daughter of the murdered EPCAF chief. It turned out she had been picked up from the road by a passer-by; she was found in poor condition, but recovered. When the little girl saw Brig. (Lt Col.) Amir, she said '*Aboo*' (father)—he was told he resembled the dead officer.

Collective Punishment for an Unknown Crime

Boroitola is a small place near Kishoreganj in Mymensingh district. Standing on a field by a memorial to the victims of an army shooting here on 13 October 1971, I talked to Muhammad Ali Akbar, a local villager who survived the shooting that killed four of his family members. A rail line cuts through the fields. There are several villages around the open fields, including Dampara, where Muhammad Ali Akbar comes from.[22]

Muhammad Ali Akbar is tall and slim, with aquiline features. He said he was about forty years old in 1971. Dressed in saffron clothes and a headband, he was clear and articulate, and seemed to have a sense of drama. Later it transpired that he wrote poetry and performed magic tricks. According to Joynal Abedin, another articulate local who was away fighting as a Muktijoddha (freedom fighter) at the time, villagers had been gathered at Boroitola that day from several neighbouring villages—Dampara, Govindapur, Kalikabari, Tilaknathpur, Chikanerchor.

According to the villagers, the army arrived in Boroitola on 13 October 1971 by train, stopping in the field where we were standing. Male villagers from around the area were summoned to the rail line by soldiers accompanied by local 'Razakars'. Muhammad Ali Akbar said that the 'Razakars' told them that the commander wanted to talk to the villagers to inspire them—'*kotha bolbe, tader udbuddho korar janya*'. Other villagers said they thought the gathering was about identity cards, which some of the villages already had.

I asked if the Pakistan army had ever come before to their villages to give pep talks; Muhammad Ali Akbar said 'no'. According to Akbar, after the men had gathered one Maulana Hafez from a nearby village spoke to the officer in charge in Urdu. Thereafter villagers from that village went off with the Maulana, shouting 'Pakistan *zindabad*' (Long live Pakistan).

Muhammad Ali Akbar never got his inspirational pep talk. According to the villagers, suddenly something made the military go crazy. Exactly what triggered it is unclear. Apparently, a local 'Razakar' named Hashem came and told the soldiers something. Some said he had spoken of his brother being shot by the Muktijoddha's (freedom fighters), or taken ill, and asking for help. There was speculation that the unit thought one of the soldiers had been killed by a rebel. Possibly the soldiers had misunderstood what the Bengali 'Razakar' had said. Apparently Hashem went back into the village with one or more soldiers. The rest of the unit set about shooting the entire assembled gathering of men.

The manner of the killing was distinctive. Akbar said the soldiers made them stand in two single files, one behind the other, each with the right hand on the shoulder of the man in front—he demonstrated how. A gun was set up in front of each line, so as to shoot through the entire line of human beings. Iqbal, a former Muktijoddha (freedom fighter) who had travelled up with me from Dhaka, thought from the description that the weapon was a Light Machine Gun (LMG), set up on a stand.

Akbar said that he heard a sound at one point and fell down immediately on the ground on his side—he collapsed dramatically to the ground to demonstrate exactly. Everyone else in the queue fell and some people fell on top of him. After shooting them the soldiers got into their train and went away. After a while Akbar tried to get up. He was uninjured. There were bodies all around, mostly dead, he said. He estimates there were ten to twelve survivors. His uncle, two cousins and a *bhatija* (nephew) were killed. Another freedom fighter in the crowd surrounding me said he lost three members of his family in the same incident. How many died altogether is not clear.[23]

Nobody at Boroitola could offer a reason why the army came to Boroitola or why the troops assembled and killed all the men. Some said that the military came looking for rebels as a nearby bridge was blown up the day before. It is unclear whether the unit came there with the intention of committing a mass killing, or whether something happened after the villagers were gathered, to set the military off on a killing spree. The area contains the village of Syed Nazrul Islam, the first president of the Bangladeshi government in exile in India. It is his son, a member of parliament, who has erected the memorial.

Joynal Abedin, the Muktijoddha who had been away at the time of the incident, said that after commemorating the 13 October killing at the memorial in the current year (2004) he received an anonymous letter threatening to blow up the memorial and kill him. This was the first time he had received such a threat. Abedin smiled as he spoke about it—he did not seem unduly worried and said he intended to carry on with his commemorating activities.

I was not able to locate Pakistan army officers who had served in the Kishoreganj area. However, I discussed the Boroitola killing with other Pakistan army officers, who found it bizarre. Apart from the lack of an explanation for the shooting in the first place, most pointed out that lining people up in single files and shooting into them was not the most effective way of killing people—so that did not seem to be the purpose. Rather, it smacked of a twisted sense of vengeance, a collective punishment for an unknown crime.[24]

Trials and Tribulations of the Fighters for Freedom

S.M. Raqib Ali took three days' leave from his job at Crescent Jute Mill in Khulna on 23 March 1971. He did not return. He said he had seen the writing on the wall and was not taking any chances. When I met him he was still in Khulna, now a senior official at the Platinum Jute Mill.[25]

S.M. Raqib Ali went to India. He said he travelled to Jalpaiguri and Bagdogra in the north of West Bengal state and then went by air to Saharanpur training camp and finally to Dehra Dun, where the Indians had set up a training camp near the Indian Military Academy.

After completing his training, Raqib Ali took part in three actions in East Pakistan. He was captured during the fourth mission in October 1971, when a group of nineteen of them went to attack a Pakistan Army and Rangers camp a few miles from Jessore cantonment. One of his group was killed, the rest were surrounded and taken captive. They were taken to Jessore cantonment.

Raqib Ali says that the then Eastern Commander, General Niazi, gave an order to his men not to kill captured Muktijoddhas, but to try them. Raqib

Ali thought this was because there was very negative international publicity on reports that captured prisoners were being killed.[26]

Whatever the reason for the order, Raqib Ali clearly owes his life to General Niazi's directive to try captured rebels, not kill them. The eighteen prisoners of his group were kept at Jessore cantonment while a military tribunal tried them. He says he was tortured during interrogation. He also says that some Swiss journalists were invited to interview them, but refused to conduct interviews if army personnel were present. As the war situation worsened for the Pakistan army, Raqib Ali and his fellow prisoners were moved to Jessore Central Jail. The process of trial took time and it was November by the time the verdict and sentence—the death penalty—were announced. Before the sentences could be carried out, however, full-scale war with India broke out. The war was over in Jessore on 6–7 December; the Indian army released Raqib Ali and his colleagues from jail.

At least Raqib Ali was among the Muktijoddhas trained in India who actually got to fight for his country's liberation. Abdur Rab Sardar, the spinner from the Crescent Jute Mill who trained in India for three months, never got the chance to come back and fight. He and his compatriots heard one day that the Pakistan Army was surrendering in Dhaka. The camps were closed and he returned to the mill area in Khulna, to find—ironically—that the war was still going on in Khulna. He told me that several hundred Pakistan Army men were entrenched in the area and it was strongly defended; the Indians had not been able to cross through. It was the day after the surrender ceremony in Dhaka.[27]

The after-taste of independence has also left many former rebel fighters bitter. At the press club in Narsingdi I met a former Muktijoddha, Kabir Mia, who used to be a mill worker.[28] When the 'troubles' started in 1971 the mill shut. Mia has been unemployed ever since. He joined the Mukti Bahini (freedom force) 'when it seemed the 'Punjabis' would kill us all', but was very bitter that those like him who fought got nothing in independent Bangladesh while those who were opposed seemed to have made good.

Bengali accounts of the 'heroic' exploits of rebel fighters in the war are punctured by some accounts given by their powerful allies, the Indians. 'It can now be said', wrote Maj. Gen. Sukhwant Singh, 'that despite the Awami League's hold on the Bengali troops in the name of patriotism, Mujib's charisma and the professional contacts in the armed forces of Col Osmani, the organisers of the insurgency had not been able to draw up and implement an integrated plan... the revolt had no strong popular base'. Initially the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) supported the operations of the rebels, but 'Unfo-

rtunately, these efforts were not very effective'. 'The failure of the revolt and the poor results obtained by the rebel forces in their operations after crossing into India led to a detailed appraisal of the situation by the Indian Government in the last week of April'. According to Maj. Gen. Singh, '... the Indian Army was asked to take over the guidance of all aspects of guerilla warfare on 30 April...'[29]

The assessment of Maj. Gen. Lachhman Singh was similar: 'The Mukti Bahini fighter was not a dedicated guerilla... the Awami League leaders were reluctant to join them and face the hazards of military struggle. The guerillas had no safe bases for operations inside East Pakistan but could safely operate from camps across the Indian border'. In Singh's view, 'It was becoming clear by July that Mukti Bahini was unable to win the confidence of the villagers'. They also avoided direct confrontation with the Pakistan army owing to the heavy casualties they suffered. However, 'The propaganda machine worked hard and to good effect. Dressed in a lungi and rifle in hand, the Mukti Bahini guerilla became an instant hero... The news-hungry press swallowed claims of fictitious successes which were widely believed'.[30]

Problems persisted even in the period from mid-October to mid-November, when:

> Indian artillery was used much more extensively in support of rebel operations in East Pakistan, and Indian military forces, including tanks and air power on a few occasions, were also used to back up the Mukti Bahini. Indian units were withdrawn to Indian territory once their objectives had been brought under the control of the Mukti Bahini—though at times this was only for short periods, as, to the irritation of the Indians, the Mukti Bahini forces rarely held their ground when the Pakistani army launched a counterattack.[31]

In Lt Gen. J.F.R. Jacob's assessment, 'There was, sometimes, a tendency for guerrilla forces to wait for the Indian Army to carry out their tasks for them and not commit themselves fully in operations'. Gen. Jacob felt that it was an error to form too large a Mukti Bahini force with too little training, which meant that their effectiveness was limited.[32] Maj. Gen. Lachhman Singh concurred: 'Views on the performance and utility of Mukti Bahini may vary considerably. I feel it was a mistake to arm such large bodies of generally half-trained, ill-motivated and leaderless volunteers, especially as they created law and order problems after the war'.[33] Ironically, it was their enemies, Pakistan army officers, who offered a more positive assessment of the volunteer Muktijoddhas: several of them told me that while the rebels did tend to 'run

away' when faced with direct combat, many of the volunteers were well-motivated politically and committed to their cause.

'The big operations are always done by the Indians.... Some of us have gone in and thrown a few hand-made grenades. But when it comes to blowing up a bridge or derailing a train, the Indians do it all themselves, taking us along as guides. And then they call it a Mukti Fauj "victory"'. This is what frustrated Bengali volunteers for the Bangladesh cause told Sasthi Brata, a British journalist of Bengali origin, who visited the rebel camps in Tripura in India and also managed to evade both the Indian authorities and Mukti Bahini officials to travel to Comilla and back disguised as a Muslim villager. Sasthi Brata found evidence of heavy involvement of the Indian army inside East Pakistan already, in August 1971. As for the rebel fighters, '... out of over 200 volunteers', he reported, 'only six had been given any kind of training at all and only three had taken part in an operation'.[34]

8

FRATRICIDE

DEATH SQUADS AT WAR'S END

The Case of the Good Doctor

Shyamoli Nasreen Choudhury is the sort of person my grandmother used to call '*thakur-er jon*' (God's own people)—someone whose simple goodness is transparent as soon as you meet her. And without meeting her, it would be hard to appreciate the circumstances of what happened to her husband, Dr Aleem Choudhury, on the eve of Bangladesh's independence in December 1971.[1]

In 1971 Dr and Mrs Aleem Choudhury lived in a three-storey house in Purana Paltan in Dhaka. Dr Choudhury, who was an eye specialist, set up his clinic on the ground floor and the family lived on the two upper floors. The Choudhurys were strong supporters of the Bangladesh liberation movement. On the night of 25–26 March 1971, as military action began in Dhaka, Syed Nazrul Islam—later the acting head of state of the Bangladeshi government-in-exile—was brought to their house. He had previously been staying at Dr Chowdhury's sister's house. He was kept in hiding in one of the rooms on the second floor until 29 March, when clad in a *saree* and wrapped in a *burkha* the future head of state was bundled off to the next hiding place, from where he fled to India.

That the Chowdhurys would extend their hospitality to one of the chief political players of the Awami League and the Bangladesh movement is no surprise given their politics. What is amazing is that they were equally generous to a fervently pro-Pakistan member of the al-Badr—a paramilitary group raised

locally by the Pakistan Army to assist it in putting down the rebellion in East Pakistan.

In July 1971 the Choudhurys' neighbour, Mr Mateen, came to Dr Choudhury with a stranger. He said the man's house had been burnt down by some people and he was homeless with his family, and requested Dr Choudhury to give him shelter in his house. Mrs Choudhury said that she objected, but Dr Choudhury was persuaded by their entreaties. The man moved into the ground floor with his wife and son. Dr Chowdhury's eye clinic had to be shifted to the first floor drawing room.

The Choudhurys' new guest was Maulana Abdul Mannan. According to pro-liberation Bangladeshis, he was a leading member of the al-Badr auxiliary paramilitary force raised locally by the Pakistan Army. About the creation of this group Gen. Niazi, the Eastern Commander, wrote:

> Although their recruitment had started earlier, sanction for the raising of this force (Razakars) was given at the end of August 1971. ... Two separate wings called Al-Badr and Al-Shams were organised. Well-educated and properly motivated students from the schools and *madrasas* were put in Al-Badr Wing, where they were trained to undertake 'Specialised Operations', while the remainder were grouped together under Al-Shams, which was responsible for the protection of bridges, vital points and other areas.[2]

Gen. Niazi wrote that the Razakars—as the loyalist activists were termed as a whole—were raw and not fully trained, poorly equipped by comparison with the automatic weapons used by the rebels, and prone to subversion and desertion, especially once the full-scale war started. They and their families were harassed by the rebels, and the army was limited in what training it could provide, owing to its operational commitments. The Razakar forces were recruited from among loyalist Bengalis, but 'In order to keep them under control and utilise them properly, they were mixed with West Pakistani police and non-Bengali elements'.

Mrs Choudhury's description of daily life in the following months is positively surreal. Downstairs, Pakistani soldiers visited the Maulana all the time, often staying raucously until late night according to Mrs Choudhury. Al-Badr youth guarded both his side of the gate and the Choudhurys'. Upstairs, Muktijoddhas (rebel fighters) came daily to the clinic, where they were given free treatment by Dr Chowdhury and then taken by car to 'safe' places. Dr Choudhury raised money and collected medicines for the rebels, and he, the cardiologist Dr Fazle Rabbi and several other doctors went to a secret hospital of the rebels to provide medical service.

Mrs Choudhury told me that after Bangladesh became independent, the President, Abu Sayeed Choudhury, called her over and asked what they

thought they were doing with the Al-Badr visiting downstairs and Muktijoddhas visiting upstairs. Mrs Choudhury had no answer for him then and had none for me either. I asked her if the neighbour who had brought Maulana Mannan over for shelter had done so in good faith or had known about his activities with Al-Badr. Mrs Choudhury was not sure—they had been on good terms with the neighbours at that time, in fact it was the neighbour's wife whose *burkha* had been borrowed to smuggle out Syed Nazrul Islam in March. It was also not clear why the Choudhurys did not request their unwelcome guest to leave or remove themselves and their pro-rebel activities to another location. Towards the end of the full-scale war between India and Pakistan they talked about moving to a safer place, but never got around to it. All of this seems impossibly naïve, until one meets Shyamoli Nasreen Choudhury and her transparently simple goodness. If her husband was remotely like her, this bizarre state of affairs does not seem quite as incredible.

Maulana Mannan, for his part, had apparently always spoken politely to Dr Choudhury, assuring him that he would never forget his help at a time of distress, and that if ever he was in any difficulty, he should come to him. He had claimed that no danger would befall the good doctor as long as he was there.

According to Mrs Chowdhury, in the afternoon of 15 December 1971, Dhaka was under heavy bombardment from the Indian air force. A small 'micro-bus', its body smeared with earth, came and stopped by the Maulana's door. Vehicles often came to his house, so the Choudhurys were not unduly disturbed. But this time, two armed Al-Badr men demanded to enter the house. Dr Choudhury knocked on Maulana Mannan's door many times, but the Maulana would not open it. He only said from inside, 'You go, I am there (for you)'. The two men took Dr Choudhury away in the micro-bus. He was wearing the casual *lungi*[3] and shirt that were typically worn at home. Mrs Choudhury told me that she pleaded with Maulana Mannan to intervene, but Maulana would do nothing. He said that the youths were his students, and that they were taking Dr Choudhury, the cardiologist Dr Fazle Rabbi and others to provide medical treatment. Dr Choudhury did not return that night. A phone call to Mrs Rabbi confirmed that Dr Rabbi had been taken away in the same manner at the same time.

The next day, 16 December 1971, the Pakistan army surrendered to India in Dhaka. The war came to an end and Bangladesh came into being. Shouts of '*Joy Bangla*' (Victory to Bengal) filled the streets. Mrs Choudhury tried to send the two boys who worked for her to look for Hafiz, her brother-in-law. The phone was dead. The boys came back as there was random shooting going on in the streets.

According to Mrs Chowdhury, Maulana Mannan suddenly appeared upstairs carrying a little *putli* (small cloth sack) and begged for shelter again—he said 'they' (meaning Bangladeshi freedom fighters) would kill him. Mrs Choudhury told him to go into the dining room, where he hid under the dining table. After a while an armed Muktijoddha arrived and asked her, 'Where is the scoundrel who killed Aleem-*bhai*?' Mrs Choudhury was dumbfounded. Maulana could not be found—he had slipped away unnoticed.

Hafiz, Dr Choudhury's brother, was finally able to come on 17 December. They all went to look for Dr Choudhury, but could not find any trace of him. His body was finally found on 18 December, at an open brick-kiln at Rayerbazar, along with the bodies of many other well-known intellectuals and professionals who had been supporters of the liberation movement. All had their hands tied behind their backs and eyes blindfolded with cloth. They are believed to have been killed on 15–16 December night. Many of the other victims' families have also recorded their accounts of what happened—all were picked up in the same manner by armed Al-Badr youth, and taken away in an earth-smeared micro-bus. Some bodies were never found.

As Mrs Choudhury describes it, Dr Aleem Choudhury had multiple bullet injuries on his chest, and sharp wounds on the left temple and left lower abdomen, believed to be bayonet wounds. He was still wearing the vest, shirt and *lungi* he had been taken away in. Mrs Chowdhury found that his face had become unnaturally blackened—but his body had been lying face down in a watery pit for two days. The *gamchha* (cloth towel) used to blindfold him was around his neck.

The December Killings

The death-squad style killing of pro-liberation intellectuals and professionals in the dying hours of the war remains one of the grossest atrocities of the 1971 conflict.[4] Many questions about it, including how many were killed in this manner, who exactly organised it and why, remain shrouded in mystery. There appears to have been no official inquiry in Bangladesh about the killings. But a comparison of Dr Aleem Choudhury's case with the reminiscences of the families and friends of many other similar victims, and an account given by the only known survivor of the Rayerbazar killings, yield some consistent information.

All of the victims seem to have been picked up from their homes in the second week of December, the vast majority on 14–15 December, by groups of

armed Bengali youths described by the victims' families as Al-Badr, and taken away in a micro-bus. Many of their bodies were found three or four days later at the Rayerbazar brick-kiln. The bodies had blindfolds and hands tied behind the backs. Some bodies were never found or identified.

Who did the December killings and why? It is widely believed in Bangladesh that the architect of the December killings of Bengali intellectuals supporting the liberation movement was Maj. Gen. Rao Farman Ali of the Pakistan Army. This is primarily because a list of names of intellectuals allegedly written by Maj. Gen. Farman Ali was found by Bangladeshis after the war. Maj. Gen. Farman Ali was certainly one of the most controversial behind-the-scenes operators of 1971, having been in charge of the civil side of Martial Law Administration in East Pakistan throughout this period and adviser to successive Governors of East Pakistan. He appears to have maintained separate communications to the regime headquarters during the conflict, and contacted the Indian army in the run-up to the surrender, without the knowledge of the Eastern Commander, Gen. Niazi. As for what motive Maj. Gen. Farman Ali, or the army, would have had for killing intellectuals on the eve of surrender, pro-liberation Bangladeshis allege that it was an attempt by West Pakistan and its Bengali supporters in East Pakistan to cripple the emerging country by wiping out prominent members of its intelligentsia.

The Hamoodur Rahman Commission set up by the post-war Pakistani government of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto reported that it had questioned Maj. Gen. Farman Ali, Lt Gen. Niazi and Maj. Gen. Jamshed, the Deputy Martial Law Administrator of Dhaka division, about the alleged killing of intellectuals. All three stated that around 9–10 December there was a meeting that considered the possibility of arresting some persons according to lists prepared by various agencies, in the event of a general uprising in Dhaka. Maj. Gen. Farman Ali claimed he advised against arresting anyone; Lt Gen. Niazi said the lists brought to him by local commanders were of rebel leaders and not intellectuals, but nevertheless he stopped them from arresting anyone; Maj. Gen. Jamshed also said that such a plan was impracticable and advised against it. All three stated that the army did not arrest or kill any intellectuals or professionals in the last days of the war.[5]

Even if a list of suspected 'liberation' supporters was found in Maj. Gen. Farman Ali's handwriting, it would not constitute conclusive proof that he had masterminded a plan to liquidate them or demonstrate sufficient motive for doing so. In the second week of December the Pakistan army was busy fighting, and losing, a war with India, and it is possible that while Razakar

groups such as the Al-Badr were created by the army earlier, these Bengali elements had started to operate on their own in the final days of the war. They would have had access to the lists or had their own lists, as they were the likely sources of the intelligence on rebel supporters in the first place. The only way to establish who planned and executed the operation to kill pro-liberation intellectuals would be to obtain the cooperation of some of the perpetrators. This can only be done by a suitable judicial authority which would be able to guarantee would-be 'grasses' security and some immunity in exchange for their cooperation.

The family members of the targeted individuals all describe the same scenario—the victims were picked up from their homes by armed Al-Badr youths who usually had their faces half covered with a cloth, and taken away in the earth-smeared micro-bus. All the evidence so far from the family members is that the youths who rounded up the targeted intellectuals and professionals were Bengalis themselves.[6] Similarly, according to the only available testimony by a survivor of the killings in Rayerbazar, the abductors and killers of the Bengali intellectuals and professionals were all Bengalis.[7]

The family of Dr Aleem Choudhury held Maulana Abdul Mannan responsible for his killing. Mannan went underground at the end of the war and 'Wanted' advertisements with his photo were circulated in Bangladesh. He was located and held in custody for a while before being let go. As the Choudhury family point out, it was not possible to try Maulana Mannan on an ordinary charge of murder, as he clearly neither abducted nor killed Dr Choudhury personally—having remained at the Choudhury residence the entire time. Only a judicial authority investigating 'crimes against humanity', in which those who orchestrated liquidations of political opponents would be held as responsible as those who actually pulled the trigger, could hope to address this issue. At the very least, the Maulana was either unable or unwilling to protect the man who had given him shelter in his time of distress—he owed Dr Choudhury, and he failed him.

Maulana Mannan may have opposed the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, but he appeared to have flourished in independent Bangladesh. During my visits to Dhaka, I saw many billboards in the city advertising a newspaper—it turned out that Maulana Mannan was its proprietor. He was active in politics and public life, and served as a federal minister in the Bangladeshi government. Shyamoli Nasreen Choudhury has been relentless in her public demands for the killers of her husband to be brought to justice—beneath her gentle exterior there is clearly a core of steel. She repeatedly named Maulana Mannan publicly

as responsible for her husband's killing; and she told me that he had threatened her and her daughters for doing so.[8]

What happened in the time between people being picked up and their bodies being found? The only account of what happened after the targeted people were picked up in the bus comes from Dilawar Hossain, an accountant, who is reported to be the only survivor of the Rayerbazar killing. Hossain was not a prominent intellectual or professional and it is unclear why he would have been picked up with the others. He has written that he was picked up on 14 December, in the morning, from his home in Shantibag and put in a bus along with another man picked up from the hostel next door. His hands were tied behind his back and he was blindfolded. The bus stopped several times and more people were picked up.

At their destination Hossain—still blindfolded—was helped up a flight of stairs and thrown into a room where he landed on several others. He was weeping loudly when someone untied his hands. Loosening his blindfold, Hossain says he saw that the person who untied his hands was a boy of eight or nine. The skin on the boy's arms were cut, his hands were swollen. The floor was full of blood and bloodied clothes, everyone in the room had injuries indicative of torture. According to Hossain the young boy loosely re-tied his hands again and Hossain kept his blindfold on in a way that allowed him to see a little.

In the evening more prisoners were brought and three or four of the captors came into the room and started questioning them. Hossain found that he was among people identifying themselves as professor of Dhaka University, doctor, journalist, and so on. The exchanges were all in Bengali. Along with questions came abuse and beating. Then the captors left. Late the same night the prisoners were helped down the stairs again and put in three buses. The buses stopped at a place where they were made to walk. Hossain saw a banyan tree, a large *bil* (lake) and about 130–140 other prisoners already sitting there.[9]

According to Hossain the Al-Badr men started to tie the prisoners' hands with ropes. Hossain was tied by his vest to the vest of the man behind him. One prisoner shouted out, 'You are Bengalis and you are killing us!' The killers moved the prisoners in batches towards the empty field, and started shooting and bayoneting. While they were busy killing the men in front of him, Hossain says he undid the knotted vest and his loosely tied hands, dropped the blindfold and ran for his life. He heard yelling and shooting behind him, but managed to get away, falling through mud and water. He hid the rest of the night by the river. In the morning he walked towards a village. From his description

of the banyan tree the villagers said that was the *ghat* at Rayerbazar. There is no available corroboration of Dilawar Hossain's account.

False reports on the killings. Ghastly as these killings were, some of the reports published and circulated in Bangladesh about them added grisly embellishments to the stories, causing more hurt to the victims' loved ones and hampering documentation of what really happened. The director of the Liberation War Museum in Dhaka informed me in all seriousness that there were reports that the victims had been tortured in particular ways—the eye specialist Dr Aleem Choudhury's eyes were gouged out, the cardiologist Dr Fazle Rabbi's heart was cut out of his chest, and so on. There are such reports published in newspapers and books in Bangladesh, and the Liberation War Museum gave me a copy of one such publication.

I had already interviewed Mrs Choudhury and she had said nothing about any injury to Dr Choudhury's eyes. Still, without specifying why, I asked her to repeat all the injuries she recalled on his body, apologising for making her go through these painful memories again. Mrs Choudhury said she did not mind and stoically repeated her description of the injuries, which is also in her published reminiscences. According to her description of Dr Chowdhury's body there was no injury to his eyes. About Dr Fazle Rabbi's body, which was also found in Rayerbazar, Mrs Rabbi has written: 'There were bullet holes on the left cheek and left side of the forehead. The chest bore numerous bullet wounds—I didn't count how many. But it is a lie that his chest had been cut open. I held that chest with my two hands and looked upon it'.[10] So Mrs Rabbi knew of the false descriptions and contradicted them in her own reminiscences years ago. Yet the needless falsehoods were being repeated in responsible circles in Dhaka fifteen years later.[11]

The other killings of December 1971. Some of the attacks and killings that occurred in December 1971 are largely absent from the 'liberation' literature of Bangladesh. One of them was widely reported in the international press at the time, along with photographs. It was the public bayoneting of a group of civilians in the heart of Dhaka by the Mukti Bahini commander Kader ('Tiger') Siddiqi of Tangail and his band of Muktijoddhas.

'Four young men were beaten and tortured for about thirty minutes before being bayoneted slowly to death in front of a huge jeering crowd of Bengalis at Bangladesh's first public rally since the surrender of the Pakistan Army', reported the *Daily Telegraph* in its front page story on 20 December 1971. 'None of the leaders of Mukti Fouj at Saturday's rally in Dacca racecourse could explain specific charges against the four, all of whom were Bengalis who had

been promised a "fair trial"'. The accompanying photo is captioned, 'Laughing guerillas watching a prisoner being beaten and tortured before he was bayoneted to death in Dacca at the weekend'.

'Mukti Bahini bayonet prisoners after prayers', reported *The Times* on the same day. Photographs and comments on the incident are included in Oriana Fallaci's feature on Sheikh Mujib in *L'Europeo* on 24 February 1972. Some of the photos taken by the foreign media show the Mukti Bahini soldiers burning the eyes of their prisoners with cigarettes before bayoneting them. A large crowd watches the killings, some of them grinning. Children are among the onlookers, and a young boy is one of the victims.[12] The Indian army is reported to have 'arrested' Siddiqi after this incident.[13]

In his two-part memoirs of the 1971 war, Kader Siddiqi has given his explanation for the killing. He claims that while he was on his way to the public rally, he and his men 'rescued' two non-Bengali young women, their elderly father and Rs. 50,000 from their own car in which four men were 'kidnapping' them. He ordered the four to be bound and brought to the rally, at which Sheikh Mujib's son Jamal was present with him on the stage. Siddiqi writes that at the end of the meeting he asked the assembled public what punishment should be given the four men he had caught; the crowd roared that they should be killed, so he obliged and the four were shot and bayoneted to death in full view of the gathering and the foreign press. Siddiqi clearly felt that the foreign media were unfair to criticise him for his public bayoneting of persons he termed 'looters and kidnappers of women'. He showed no sign of recognising that there was anything wrong in torturing and bayoneting people to death without any judicial process.[14]

'I saw a number of men arguing with my wife and a cousin of mine, trying to push their way up.... One of the men seized me by the collar and dragged me, unresisting, down the staircase... into a jeep waiting outside...' So begins the account of a survivor of the kidnap and attempted murder of a prominent Bengali intellectual in Dhaka. Arriving at the abductors' destination, 'I was led up to a large room on the second floor... The young man who was holding me by the collar suddenly slapped me across the face with tremendous force... I was stripped of my cardigan, shirt and vest and relieved of my watch, cuff-links and spectacles. They blindfolded me, using my own handkerchief for the purpose, tied my hands together behind my back, and began to beat me with a strap of leather, also hitting me with something hard on the knuckles'.

After a night of captivity in these conditions, the prisoner was taken out at dawn, dumped on the floor of the back of a jeep and taken to an unknown

location. Bound, gagged and blindfolded, he was stabbed three times on the chest and then hit with a crippling blow on the spine, at which point he lost consciousness. He was left for dead. Miraculously he survived, and when he was being helped by passers-by he discovered that another colleague from his university was lying nearby, also still alive.

This incident, eerily reminiscent of the abduction and murder of intellectuals and professionals on 14–15 December, happened on 19–20 December 1971, three days after independent Bangladesh came into being. The target, who survived in a paralytic condition, was Syed Sajjad Husain, Professor of English and Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University and former Vice-Chancellor of Rajshahi University. The other professor found near him was Dr Hasan Zaman. The assailants in this case were not the pro-Pakistan Al-Badr, who were now the hunted, but the pro-liberation Muktijoddha (rebel) fighters, mostly Dhaka University students according to Dr Husain.

Dr Husain, who had been Vice-Chancellor of Rajshahi University from 1969 to mid-1971 before becoming Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University, was a firm supporter of united Pakistan. His would-be assassins were Bengali youths, like the Al-Badr—Bengali youths who disagreed with his political point of view. Their way of dealing with political dissent was also identical. Just as the pro-liberation professionals were accused of treachery—against Pakistan—by the Al-Badr, the rebels accused pro-unity intellectuals like Dr Husain of treachery: in this case, treachery against the cause of Bangladesh. The students attacking him told him that he was 'an unrepentant swine and had not mended my ways and therefore deserved now to be shot as a traitor'. In addition, 'They said I was responsible for the deaths of University teachers and students killed by the Pakistan Army, and that I had even been supplying girls to the soldiers from the women's hall for immoral purposes. I was dumbfounded. I told them that they might kill me if they wished, but their accusations were all false, and I was prepared to face a trial'. But the armed youth of neither side had any interest in the principles or institutions of democracy, free society or justice. It is noteworthy that both the Al-Badr and the Muktijoddhas in these instances were educated young Bengali men. The place where Dr Husain was held and beaten was the Science Annexe building on the university campus. He was left for dead in the square in front of Gulistan Cinema on Jinnah Avenue.[15]

Attacks and killings spill over into 1972. One of the strangest 'disappearances' of a prominent Bengali professional was that of the film-maker Zahir Raihan. His 'disappearance', and presumed killing, are included in the 'liberation' lit-

erature of Bangladesh. However, Zahir Raihan disappeared in Dhaka on 30 January 1972. His disappearance cannot be attributed to the Pakistan army, which had by then become POWs of India, or on the Al-Badr, who were then at the receiving end of the cycle of revenge. By the time Raihan vanished, Sheikh Mujib had returned to an independent Bangladesh to a hero's welcome and become Prime Minister of the new country.

Raihan's brother, the journalist Shahidullah Kaiser, was one of the victims of the 14–15 December killings of pro-liberation intellectuals. Both brothers had been involved in Leftist politics. Shahidullah Kaiser was picked up by the Al-Badr youth on 14 December in the same way as the others. His body was never found by his family. Zahir Raihan, who had been away in India, returned to Dhaka on 17 December and tried to find out what had happened to his brother. He also set up an investigating committee to probe the December killings of pro-liberation intellectuals and professionals. He was still investigating when he himself disappeared on 30 January 1972.[16]

Biharis massacred by Bengalis, again. Almost a year to the day after Bihari men, women and children had been massacred by Bengalis in the jute mills of Khulna, they were massacred again, in independent Bangladesh ruled by Sheikh Mujib and the Awami League.[17]

According to Bihari survivors, on 10 March 1972 Bihari jute mill workers and their families in the New Town Colony in Khulna were surrounded by Bengalis between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. and Bihari men, women and children were slaughtered. The Biharis claimed that similar attacks on non-Bengalis occurred in many parts of the country that day. Bengali workers at the jute mills confirmed to me that the massacre had occurred and that 'hundreds' of Biharis were killed that day, while the Bihari survivors I spoke to claimed 20,000–25,000 victims. A reasonable estimate therefore might be that several thousand Bihari men, women and children were killed in the massacre.

Curiously, the Bengali workers described a contrast between the Old Town Colony and the New Town Colony that day. According to them, in Old Town Colony, the manager, whom they referred to as 'Rahman Saheb', protected the Biharis even though he was a Bengali and an Awami League supporter. In New Town Colony, the manager—named as 'Shahid'—allowed the Muktijoddhas a few hours to kill Biharis before seeking to control the situation.

When the Bangladesh army arrived later, the survivors were moved to refugee camps. According to the Bihari survivors, the Red Cross visited and recorded details of the massacre. Foreign journalists came to cover the carnage as well. The day I was having this conversation in Khulna, a *bhukha hartal*

(fast) was being observed in Dhaka by the leaders of the stranded Biharis, who are not accepted by either Bangladesh or Pakistan. I visited two of the camps where thousands of people, who were defined out of both the nationalisms that went to war in East Pakistan in 1971, live in indescribable squalor.

The drawings and redrawings of borders in South Asia had another strange twist among the survivors of Khulna. Pervez Alam Khan, a Bihari who said he joined the Pakistan army and fought against the Mukti Bahini in 1971, still lives in Khulna. Like many others in his position, he feels completely betrayed by the Pakistan army, as at the end of the war they were not allowed to leave as POWs with the Pakistanis, but were left behind in the newly created Bangladesh. He said he spent two years in Dinajpur Jail and is fortunate to be alive. According to him there were seventy-two Biharis like him in the jail. Pervez Alam has intelligence and personality and seems to have made something of his life as a local leader. He said a relative of his was in the Indian army stationed in Khulna at the end of the war and took his family to India, so that none of them got killed in the massacre of 10 March 1972 at New Town. He said his father had been in the British Indian army, and had settled in East Pakistan upon the creation of Pakistan in 1947.

Pakistan had been created then as a homeland for South Asia's Muslims. It was only to be expected that some Muslims from the eastern regions of the subcontinent would move to settle in its Eastern province. In a mere twenty years, the criterion for 'belonging' to that territory had changed to the linguistic-ethnic category of 'Bengali'. By the end of 1971 there were three nation-states in the region: but the Muslim 'Biharis' of the former East Pakistan had nowhere to go.

9

WORDS AND NUMBERS

MEMORIES AND MONSTROUS FABLES

'Do you remember when they said there were 1000 bodies and they had the graves and then we couldn't find 20?'

– Henry Kissinger to Secretary of State William Rogers[1]

'Nationalist politicians on both sides took the narcissism of minor difference and turned it into a monstrous fable according to which their own side appeared as blameless victims, the other side as genocidal killers'.

– Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging*[2]

Words

In the 'liberation literature' of Bangladesh, the term for the Pakistan Army is '*Khansena*'. '*Sena*' means 'army' or 'soldier', while '*Khan*' is an Islamic title which both West Pakistanis and East Pakistanis (Bengalis) might have. Indeed, some of my own ancestors sported the title several centuries ago.[3] However, in Bangladeshi accounts of 1971 the term '*Khansena*' applies to West Pakistani military personnel only and carries a strongly negative connotation. Curiously, the West Pakistani army officers I spoke to in the course of researching this book seemed unaware that they are collectively referred to as '*Khansena*' in Bengali in the context of the 1971 conflict. Its usage seems to have been restricted to internal reference among Bengalis only.

On the other hand, almost all the West Pakistani officers told me that they were referred to by Bengalis in East Pakistan as '*shala Punjabi*'—roughly translated as 'Punjabi bastards'[4]—regardless of whether they were really from the province of Punjab or not. However, they were missing the most of it. More often in the Bangladeshi published material on the 1971 conflict, West Pakistani army personnel are referred to as a variety of animals. A common term is '*Punjabi kukur*'—'Punjabi dog'—which combines two labels: the lumping together of all West Pakistanis as 'Punjabis' regardless of their actual ethnicity, and the use of an animal term meant to maximise insult.

Other epithets include '*borbor*' (barbarian), '*doshyu*' (bandit), '*noropishach*' (human demon), '*noroposhu*' (human animal), '*hyena*', '*shwapad*' (tiger), usually combined with suitable adjectives—such as '*hingsro hyena*' (ferocious hyena) and so on. The West Pakistanis are also frequently described as breaking into '*ullash*' (jubilation) and '*ottohashi*' (loud and dramatic laughter) while tormenting Bengalis—in a manner befitting villains in the style of the rustic Bengali folk theatre called '*jatra*', whose closest approximation in the West is the English pantomime. In comparison, the West Pakistani descriptions of Bengali rebels as 'miscreants', '*Mukti*'s, or at most 'Awami League thugs' are feeble.

Given the loaded labelling by all sides, an even-handed approach needs to adhere as much as possible to relatively neutral or plainly descriptive terms, such as 'officer/soldier', 'military authority/regime', or 'rebel', with distinctions drawn as necessary between civilian 'volunteers' joining the armed uprising and the Bengali officers and soldiers of the Pakistan Army and police who mutinied and fought for the independence of Bangladesh.

In the Indo-Bangladeshi narrative, the conflict in 1971 is called the 'liberation war of Bangladesh' ('*muktijuddha*') and those who fought for the achievement of that goal, civilian and military, are referred to as Muktijoddhas (freedom fighters). Some Bangladeshis appear to object to the term 'civil war' to describe the conflict in 1971—even though that is a statement of the reality, and widely used by outside scholars—in the erroneous belief that it somehow belittles the 'war of liberation'. In fact it is precisely because some people were fighting to secede from Pakistan and form the independent state of Bangladesh that there was a 'civil war' in Pakistan that year, culminating in an inter-state war between India and Pakistan. A similar problem exists on the issue of referring to the territory as 'East Pakistan' or 'Bangladesh'. Until the country of Bangladesh officially came into being at the end of the year, the territory was still a province of Pakistan.

Bengali rebels (Muktijoddhas) are referred to in Bangladeshi publications as '*bir*' (brave, heroic), '*Bangla'r damal chhelera*' (turbulent boys of Bengal) or more affectionately as '*bichchhu-ra*' (little rascals). Pro-regime Bengalis are called '*Razakars*'—which is used virtually as a term of abuse. It seems to have evolved its connotation during the 1971 conflict (when the Pakistani regime raised auxiliaries so called), so much so that Sheikh Mujib—imprisoned in West Pakistan from 25 March 1971 for the duration of the conflict—is reported to have asked in bewilderment, 'What is a Razakar?' when on his way to Dhaka to become the Prime Minister of the newly created Bangladesh in January 1972.[5] Those who cooperated with the Pakistani regime are also referred to as '*hanadar-der sahayogi*' or '*dosor*' (assistants or partners of the invaders), '*dalal*' (agent) and other similar terms.[6]

The Pakistan army is also constantly referred to in the Bangladeshi literature as an 'occupying force', or '*hanadar bahini*' (invading force, raiders). This is a mindless misrepresentation of reality. In 1971 East Pakistan was a province of Pakistan, a country created in 1947 as a homeland for South Asia's Muslims, through a movement in which East Bengal played a significant role. The Pakistan army was present in the province as it was in other provinces of the newly created state. Bengalis served both in the existing units of the army and in the special Bengal regiments raised later. Just as West Pakistanis served in East Pakistan, Bengali officers were posted in West Pakistan.

Bengalis who later decided they wanted to secede from Pakistan and fight for an independent country could have termed the Pakistan army '*shotru*'—'enemy forces'—whom they wished to eject, instead of resorting to pointless attempts to erase history by labelling them 'occupying' or 'invading' forces, as though they had suddenly appeared from a foreign land. Moreover, many Bengalis did not support the idea of secession and continued to consider the Pakistan regime the legitimate government, and some Bengali officers continued to serve in the Pakistan army, defending what was still Pakistani territory. There was only one 'invading force' in East Pakistan in 1971—that was India.

The Enemy as Demon

The portrayal of the regime as 'villains' in the Bengali depiction of the struggle for the independence of Bangladesh also took some other interesting forms. One was visual art. One of the most memorable artistic creations from the period was a cartoon-style sketch of General Yahya Khan: with glowering eyes

and Dracula-like teeth, he was presented as a veritable monster. As a political cartoon it was brilliant. As an instrument of black propaganda it proved remarkably effective as well, aiding the complete 'demonisation' of General Yahya, his regime and the army.

As General Yahya Khan was the head of the military regime and the person responsible for the decision to launch a military action to crush the Bengali rebellion, it is only to be expected that he would be a prime symbol for 'demonisation' by the rebels. Yet it is also supremely ironic, as indicated in earlier chapters, as General Yahya personally seems to have neither harboured nor brooked prejudice against Bengalis. On the contrary, he accepted their economic grievances as legitimate, took steps to redress the imbalance in Bengali representation in the Army and the civil service, replaced the 'parity principle' with elections based on 'one person one vote' which ensured the more numerous Bengalis an advantage in democratic politics, and seemed to be prepared to make a deal with Sheikh Mujib, the winner, whom he referred to publicly as the 'future prime minister of Pakistan'.

Another way of 'demonising' the enemy practised by the pro-liberation side was to accuse the Pakistan army of 'monstrous' actions, regardless of evidence. Accusing the enemy of wantonly killing non-combatant civilians, molesting women and especially killing women and children is a common tactic to 'smear' the other side. As earlier chapters have shown, the Pakistan army did kill unarmed civilians in many instances—Dhaka University faculty and staff on 25–26 March, Shankharipara on 26 March, Thanapara on 13 April, Chuknagar on 20 May, Boroitola on 13 October, for instance. There appears to be a clear pattern in these cases of the Pakistan army targeting adult men, while sparing women and children. Female casualties in these instances appear to have been unintentional, as in the cases of women caught in the crossfire.

As shown by the descriptions of these incidents, the actual actions of some army personnel in these instances were enough to taint the entire army and the regime of the day. However, the process of 'demonisation' necessarily goes much further than what actually happened. Apart from exaggerating the number of casualties in the true events—a needless distortion, often to absurd levels—pro-liberation Bengalis cite other instances, some of which are distorted versions of actual events, others are pure fabrication, and yet others actually 'transfer' the blame for 'monstrous' actions of the Bengali liberationist side onto the enemy. Hence the incident at Joydevpur on 19 March was described in Bangladeshi liberation literature as a 'random' firing by the army

on 'unarmed civilians' when it was actually the result of a violent provocation by an armed and inflamed mob; stories of the Pakistan army attacking women at the women's hostel in Dhaka University on 25–26 March were circulated and turned out to be entirely false; and the massacre of West Pakistani civilians in Jessore on 1 April by pro-liberation Bengalis was passed off internationally as Bengali civilians killed by the Pakistan army.[7]

The dead orphans of Dhaka. One of the stories that cropped up during my visits to Bangladesh was the allegation that the Pakistani armed forces had bombed an orphanage in the heart of Dhaka in the last days of the war in December, killing hundreds of children. This was odd, as all accounts of the full-scale India-Pakistan war in December note that because of Indian bombing of Dhaka airport, Pakistani air support was grounded by 6 December, after which the skies over East Pakistan were India's alone. When I pointed this out, Bangladeshis replied that they had heard the noise of an aircraft and that it must have been a helicopter from which the Pakistanis had bombed the orphanage.[8] As to why the Pakistan army should bomb an orphanage in Dhaka, a city it was defending, while its men were fighting India with their backs to the wall, there was no real answer, except of course the 'demonised' one: the assertion that the West Pakistanis were 'monsters'.[9]

Yet foreign media reports are available on the bombing of the orphanage, even published by the Bangladesh government in its 'documents' series on 1971. They confirm that the orphanage was destroyed by Indian bombing that had missed its target. *The Observer* reported on 12 December in its 'Dacca Diary' for Thursday 9 December:

> The worst of it till now is the horror of the Islamic orphanage, hit by Indian bombs at 4 o'clock this morning. Three hundred boys and girls were sleeping there. I saw the place soon after dawn. Bombs had ploughed everyone into a vast and hideous mud-cake, most of them dead.... Bombing at night is a deadly thing, and unnecessary here. These bombs were aimed at the airport runway, but the Indians had been attacking it for five days by daylight. Only at midday today did a pilot finally put a bomb right on it. But up to then we had all agreed with an Australian correspondent here who muttered on the first day: 'The Indians couldn't hit a bull in the bum with a banjo'.[10]

The Times reported on 13 December that a group of foreign nationals had been airlifted to Calcutta from Dhaka after several attempts had failed because of Indian air raids on Dhaka. 'They confirmed that an orphanage was destroyed several days ago by five 500lb to 1,000lb bombs intended for the railway yards 105 yards away, with the death—according to the Pakistani authorities—of

300 boys. A German television cameraman said that he saw 20 bodies but he believed that more were buried under the rubble'.[11]

There are several other reports of Indian bombs missing their targets and causing civilian casualties. *The Observer*'s 'Dacca Diary' reported from Narayanganj: 'Bombing at night, Indian pilots had hit the sleeping heart of a pauper residential area half a mile from a power-station. Four or five hundred civilians were killed and 150 were in hospital'.[12] Jahanara Imam's journal records heavy bombing on 14 December, the day of her husband's burial, with civilian casualties all around the neighbourhood.[13]

The nationalism of ethnic hatred. The 'demonisation' of the enemy also involves concealing or minimising 'monstrous' acts committed by one's own side. In the dominant narrative of the 1971 conflict until now, the portrayal of the Pakistan Army as 'demons' is matched by an exclusive depiction of 'Bengalis' (used as synonymous with 'pro-liberation Bengalis') as 'victims'. This has led to a tendency to deny, minimise or justify violence and brutalities perpetrated by pro-liberation Bengalis.

As has been shown in this book, the Bengali nationalist rebellion in East Pakistan was openly militant and quickly turned into xenophobic violence against non-Bengalis—Biharis, West Pakistanis and foreigners—of whom the Biharis, who arguably 'belonged' to East Pakistan the most as they had migrated from India to settle there, ironically suffered the most. In the ethnic violence unleashed in the name of Bengali nationalism, non-Bengali men, women and children were slaughtered, for instance in housing colonies in Chittagong, in the Karnaphuli Mills, in the jute mill colonies at Khulna, in the railway town of Santahar; West Pakistani businessmen were massacred in Jessore; in mutinous East Bengal regiments, Bengali officers and men killed the greatly outnumbered and even disarmed West Pakistani fellow-officers and their families in many units. The killing of non-Bengalis continued after Bangladesh became independent, as for example in the jute mill colonies in Khulna. As this study has shown, non-Bengali victims of ethnic killings by Bengalis numbered hundreds or even thousands per incident—an indication of the scale of these crimes. Men, women and children were massacred on the basis of ethnicity and the killings were executed with shocking bestiality.

Some of the worst brutalities were also among Bengalis themselves—between those who were defending the unity and integrity of Pakistan and those who were fighting for the liberation of Bangladesh. The killing of pro-liberation professionals by pro-regime death squads in the dying days of the war stands out as one of the worst crimes of the conflict. Yet brutalisation and

elimination of those with a different political viewpoint seemed to be the hallmark of nationalist Bengalis too, as evidenced by numerous instances during the year and afterwards. As neither side rose above it, ethnic/political murder descended to a vicious cycle of vengeance. One West Pakistani officer serving in the northern area of East Pakistan where there was a considerable Bihari population testified to vicious Bengali violence against non-Bengalis, but said that the Biharis' actions against Bengalis were also very dubious. Generally in the province pro-liberation Bengalis held the upper hand until April, thereafter Biharis and loyalist Bengalis exacted revenge till the end of the year, until Indian invasion and the establishment of Bangladesh returned the pro-liberation Bengalis for another round of vengeance. As no one was brought to justice, violence remained the dominant political currency in Bangladesh.

The Benevolent 'Beluchis' in Bengal

East Pakistan's rebellion in 1971 expressed itself as a 'Bengali' ethno-linguistic nationalism, sweeping aside the previous idea of a 'Muslim nation' which had been the basis of the creation of Pakistan. It appears to have led to a complete 'ethnicisation' of the war from the Bengali nationalist side. The political battle between those who were defending a united Pakistan and those who were fighting for a liberated Bangladesh was not only presented as 'West Pakistan' versus 'East Pakistan', but transformed into the shorthand of a clash between 'Punjabis' and 'Bengalis'. The possibility of Bengalis on the pro-unity side, or at least on relatively neutral ground short of secession, is simply denied in this conceptualisation, except to acknowledge the seemingly exceptional 'collaborators'. The term 'Punjabi' is widely used in the Bangladeshi liberation literature as a pejorative word, representing all West Pakistanis regardless of their actual ethnicity. 'Biharis', the Muslim migrants from northern India who had settled in East Pakistan, are also marked out as 'enemy', allied with the 'Punjabis'.

One of the remarkable outcomes of my research in this respect was the emergence of an ethnic group named by Bengali nationalists as 'Beluchis', whom they identified as the more 'humane' individuals among West Pakistani army personnel. Baloch people are the inhabitants of Balochistan, a province in West Pakistan with its own rebellious history. During interviews, a wide variety of Bangladeshis—in towns and villages, men and women, in different districts with different experiences of the conflict—mentioned 'Beluchis' as a better sort among the West Pakistanis they encountered during the conflict.

Every small kindness shown to Bengalis was attributed to the person being a 'Beluchi'. The published Bangladeshi reminiscences of 1971 also contain many references to humane gestures by 'Beluchi' officers or soldiers of the Pakistan Army.

Mahmooda Begum Guinea was just a girl when she and other women and children were separated from the men on the river bank at Thanapara in Rajshahi on 13 April. She related to me that some of the soldiers guarding them looked distressed and had tears in their eyes as the women wailed. The women and children were sent back to the village. The assembled men became targets of mass execution afterwards. Despite this traumatic incident, Mahmooda remembered that not all of the Pakistan Army soldiers were bad—the 'Beluchis' were the kinder ones, she said.[14]

Raihan Ali, Mahmooda Begum's husband, recalled an incident later in the year when he, then a 12-year-old boy, had been rounded up from his home in the village by two soldiers and put to work building a 'bunker' by the Sarda police academy. An officer came by—a 'Beluchi' according to Raihan—and asked him who had brought him there. When the boy pointed out the two soldiers, the officer severely reprimanded them. Then he gave Raihan some money out of his own pocket and told him to go home.[15]

When Abul Barq Alvi and his fellow prisoners of the Dhaka guerrilla groups were being tortured and interrogated at the Martial Law courts at the MP hostel in Dhaka, they were given nothing to eat or drink until an older soldier brought the prisoners some bread one night. Alvi thought the soldier was 'Beluchi'.[16]

Jaladhar Sengupta of the Prabartak Sangha welfare organisation in Chittagong wrote that he was among the few men left sheltering at their centre at Dhalghat on 20 May, when five Pakistan army soldiers arrived there. According to Sengupta, he and four others were made to sit on the field of the school. 'Three Beluchi soldiers left the field and went away. They said, 'We will not shoot elderly unarmed people'. One of the two remaining Punjabis shot at us'.[17]

Pratiti Devi has given a terrifying account of how soldiers burst into their house in Comilla on the night of 29 March and took away her elderly father-in-law, the politician and legislator Dhirendra Nath Datta, and her *debar*—younger brother-in-law—Dilip. Neither ever returned. She and her daughter were made to remain in another room during the operation, and all attempts to come out and see what was happening were prevented by a 'young Beluch Captain' who blocked their way, holding a long torch. According to Pratiti Devi, 'The Beluch young man stood in front of the door until the last soldier

left. Later I realised it was because of this young man that Aroma and I survived with our lives that day'.[18]

The appearance of so many 'Beluchis' among the armed forces serving in East Pakistan in 1971 is intriguing, as the proportion of ethnic Balochis has historically been low in the Pakistani army. Also, Bengalis in East Pakistan were unlikely to be able to differentiate between ethnic Balochis and other West Pakistani ethnicities by their appearance. There were 'Baluch' regiments of the Pakistan Army serving in East Pakistan, of course, but 'Baluch' regiments are not composed of ethnic 'Balochis'—they mostly comprise Punjabis and Pathans. In fact, during discussions with me, Pakistan Army officers who served in East Pakistan in 1971 were pretty sure that there were no Balochis in the army at the time in the Eastern province.

Some of the officers—especially the ones from Baluch regiments—wondered if this certificate of good conduct from Bengalis might be meant for the Baluch regiments as a whole, but that is not the case. The Bangladeshis use the term 'Beluchi' in an ethnic sense, referring to particular individuals from a variety of different regiments. The other ethnic group also mentioned as relatively humane and sympathetic to the Bengalis' plight is identified as the 'Pathans'.

There were of course many ethnic Pathans among officers and men of the Pakistan Army. Indeed, General Yahya Khan, the President lampooned by the Bangladeshis as a monster, was a Persian-speaking Pathan. Lt Gen. Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi, the Eastern Commander, was also a Pathan born in Punjab. Lt Gen. (Brig.) Jehanzeb Arbab, who commanded the 57 Brigade and took a leading role in the military action in Dhaka and Rajshahi in March-April 1971, is a Pathan too. On the other hand, Lt Gen. Jagjit Singh Aurora, the Indian Eastern Commander and hero to Bengali nationalists, was a Punjabi, as were many other officers and men of the Indian army!

So if there were no ethnic Balochis in the Pakistan army in East Pakistan, who were the mysterious 'Beluchis' who tempered the military regime's suppression of the Bengali rebellion with their humane actions? The logical answer is that they do not exist except in the ethnic imagination of Bangladeshi nationalists. The conflict in East Pakistan in 1971 was a political battle which was given an ethno-linguistic articulation by Bengali nationalists. In a striking contrast, West Pakistani sources typically frame the conflict in political terms—as a struggle between maintaining the unity of Pakistan and the secession of East Pakistan to form independent Bangladesh—while Bangladeshi nationalists typically frame it in ethnic terms, as (freedom-loving, democratic)

'Bengalis' versus (colonial, oppressive) 'Punjabis'. The redefined identities based on language and ethnic origin pitted Muslim against Muslim in South Asia's homeland for the Muslim 'nation'. The issues of discrimination, representation, federalism and autonomy, which came to a head as a battle between unity and secession, were reduced in that articulation to West Pakistan versus East Pakistan and then ultimately to the short-hand of 'Punjabi' (plus 'Bihari') versus 'Bengali'.

In the conceptualisation of the conflict in terms of ethnicity rather than politics the appearance of 'good guys' amidst the 'demonised' enemy poses a particular problem. The Bengali nationalists could have simply left it as a few exceptional humane individuals among the '*shala Punjabi*' (Punjabi bastards), but they appear instead to have invented a whole new ethnic category. The choice of Balochistan may have something to do with a feeling of solidarity with another oppressed and rebellious province—General Tikka Khan, who was sent as Governor of East Pakistan in March 1971 and oversaw the military action, was also known as the 'butcher of Balochistan' for quelling an uprising there.

How this mythical band of Beluchis took on national proportions is unclear, but Bengalis are wonderful raconteurs and rumours do fly fast. The rebels redefined the conflict in terms of ethno-linguistic identity so successfully that its ramifications could be seen at the village level: when recounting the massacre of male villagers on 13 April in Thanapara in Rajshahi district, when a similar site nearby had not suffered the same fate, the villagers stated to me—as if by way of explanation, but with no evidence—that the officer who did the killing in Thanapara was a 'Punjabi', while the one who had gone to the other site was 'Pathan'.

During the course of researching specific events for this book, I came across one instance of a Pakistan army officer who was at least a resident of the province of Balochistan: Capt. Sammad Ali of 27 Baluch Regiment, whose company was sent to Kushtia on 25–26 March. Lt Ataullah Shah, who was serving with him in Kushtia, told me that Capt. Sammad Ali was a 'Hazara' from Balochistan. As related earlier, Lt Ataullah is one of only 11 men out of nearly 155 men including four officers, who survived a rebel attack in Kushtia on the night of 29 March and an ambush as they tried to retreat to their base in Jessore. So what did Bengali nationalists do when they came across a West Pakistani who really was from Balochistan? According to Lt Ataullah who witnessed the scene, they captured him after the ambush, held him down by the river and butchered him.[19]

Numbers

Popular support for secession. The results of the December 1970 elections in East Pakistan are often taken to be incontrovertible evidence of overwhelming support for the creation of 'Bangladesh'. The Awami League, under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won 75 per cent of the popular vote in East Pakistan and 160 out of 162 seats of the province.[20] It was a verdict to silence all debate—or so it seems.

The Awami League's popular mandate in terms of percentage of votes and seats won has obscured some other interesting numbers and other possible interpretations of the election results. If the election—widely acknowledged as the first free and fair one in the country—was regarded by Bengali East Pakistanis as essentially a referendum on such a major a constitutional issue as secession, one would expect the voter turnout in East Pakistan to be relatively high. Yet, oddly, the voter turnout in East Pakistan is given as only 56 per cent, lower than in the provinces of Punjab (66 per cent) and Sind (58 per cent) in West Pakistan, though higher than in North West Frontier Province (47 per cent) and Balochistan (39 per cent). It would appear that 44 per cent of the East Pakistani electorate was too disinterested in the issues of the election to vote, or else had some disincentive to go out to vote.

Of those who did vote in East Pakistan, three-quarters voted for the Awami League, showing that the party had been highly successful in bringing out its vote on election day. As only 56 per cent of the electorate voted, it meant that 42 per cent of the total electorate voted for the Awami League. That is well short of a majority of the electorate, but still an impressive showing for the party. However, even the 42 per cent vote in favour of the Awami League cannot be interpreted as a vote for secession. The relatively low turnout suggests that the electorate did not consider the election to be a referendum on such a major issue, and Sheikh Mujib did not present it as such during the campaign. Those who voted for him may have been expressing their alienation from the existing regime, in favour of change, redress of perceived discrimination and greater autonomy. Only an unknown fraction of them may have sought outright secession at that point.

Similarly, the 58 per cent of the total electorate that did not vote for Sheikh Mujib—either by staying home or by voting for other parties—cannot be interpreted as having been in favour of the status quo. Many of them may have shared the grievances of other voters, but not regarded Sheikh Mujib and his party as the solution.

One of the most striking aspects of the Bangladeshi 'liberation literature' is the pervasive presence of those termed 'Razakars' or 'collaborators'—Bengalis

who cooperated with the regime in its quest to keep the two wings of Pakistan united. The thirteen volumes of individual Bangladeshi reminiscences—'*Smriti 1971*' (Memories 1971)—and all the rest of the 'pro-liberation' literature are replete with references to those among the Bengalis themselves who were on the side of the regime, in favour of the unity of Pakistan. They are presented in a very negative light—as those who did not respond to the call for freedom, who informed on the 'freedom fighters', captured them, guarded them, handed them over to the army or even killed them—but they are present in virtually every story, in every village and every neighbourhood.

Perhaps the politically active 'Razakars' were only a minority, but, as in the case of the active pro-liberation fighters, for every activist on either side of the political divide there were likely to be many others who quietly shared his belief, and a good part of the population that was not firmly on one side or the other. There is also a constant complaint in the Bangladeshi 'liberation literature' that the 'collaborators' were quickly rehabilitated in independent Bangladesh, rising to positions of power and influence. This suggests that failure to support actively the creation of Bangladesh, and even active opposition to secession from Pakistan in 1971, were not 'hanging offences' as far as many Bangladeshis were concerned. Even those who shared the sense of alienation from West Pakistan may have balked at sudden and immediate secession from a 'homeland' they had created a mere twenty years before.

Date(s) of the war. The date of the start of full-fledged war between India and Pakistan in 1971 is a contested issue. The date popularly given out is 3 December, the one announced by India, but this is merely the date the war spread to include the Western sector. In a sense India's involvement in the war may be taken to be from March, and its involvement in the politics of the province perhaps from even earlier. Numerous Bangladeshi pro-liberation accounts blithely recount close contact and coordination with Indian authorities prior to the military action taken by the Pakistani regime, as well as Indian involvement and casualties in 'actions' in East Pakistan throughout the year. Many of the Pakistani officers I spoke to described Indian penetration of the territory as pervasive. 'The big operations are always done by the Indians', reported *The Guardian* on 18 September 1971, after an ethnic Bengali, who blended in with the local population and needed no translation, visited the training camps of the Mukti Bahini in India and crossed into East Pakistan with a guide on his own. Of the couple of hundred Bengali 'volunteers' who were said to be in the border area he visited, only six had been given any training at all and only three had taken part in any operation.[21]

The start-date of the open all-out war in East Pakistan turns out not to have been 3 December after all. General Niazi, the Eastern Commander of the Pakistan army, was irritated enough by claims of a 'lightning campaign' by India to devote a separate section in his book to the subject, entitled 'The Date of the War': 'On the night of 20/21 November 1971, the Indian Army attacked East Pakistan from all directions'.[22] General Niazi is of course an interested party in this debate, but his assertion is supported by the work of the American scholars Sisson and Rose. They conclude that India decided in favour of eventual direct military intervention as early as April 1971, and then devised a phased strategy. 'The American government was correct in its assessment that India had already decided to launch a military operation in East Pakistan when Mrs. Gandhi came to Washington in early November pretending that she was still seeking a peaceful solution'.

However, the initial phase of Indian assistance to the rebel forces from East Pakistan failed in the sense that '[th]e newly organised Mukti Bahini had not been able to prevent the Pakistani army from regaining control over all the major urban centers on the East Pakistani-Indian border and even establishing a tenuous authority in most of the rural areas. The next phase in Indian tactics, from July to mid October, involved both much more intensive training of the Mukti Bahini and direct involvement in Mukti Bahini activities by Indian military personnel.... The Mukti Bahini campaign, with some disguised Indian involvement' was directed at strategic targets. Indian artillery was used in support.

In the next phase, from mid-October to 20 November, according to Sisson and Rose, Indian artillery was used more extensively and Indian military forces, tanks and air power were also used. 'Indian units were withdrawn to Indian territory once their objectives had been brought under the control of the Mukti Bahini—though at times this was only for short periods, as, to the irritation of the Indians, the Mukti Bahini forces rarely held their ground when the Pakistani army launched a counterattack'.

'After the night of 21 November, however, the tactics changed in one significant way—Indian forces did not withdraw. From 21 to 25 November several Indian army divisions, divided into smaller tactical units, launched simultaneous military actions on all of the key border regions of East Pakistan, and from all directions, with both armored and air support'.[23]

As for the date of 3 December, Sisson and Rose wrote, 'The Government of India was greatly relieved and pleasantly surprised when Pakistan, after temporizing in its responses to the Indian military intervention in East Pakistan

for nearly two weeks, ordered the Pakistani air force in West Pakistan to strike at major Indian air installations in northwestern India on 3 December'.[24] The inaction for two weeks contradicted the Pakistani strategic doctrine that the defence of the East lay in the West. In an even more bizarre move, as General Niazi has confirmed, when the Pakistani regime finally launched the attack in the Western sector on 3 December it did so without consulting or informing its Eastern command which was already fighting a war in the East.

Prisoners of war. One of the most notable 'numbers' of 1971 in circulation is the assertion that '93,000 Pakistani soldiers' were taken prisoner by India at the end of the war. This statement has been repeated, virtually unchallenged, in practically every form of publication. It is a number about which one expects a certain precision—after all the number of POWs in India had to be an exact figure, not an approximation. Yet it turns out that 93,000 soldiers were not, in fact, taken prisoner.

In March 1971, the number of West Pakistani troops in East Pakistan was reported to be 12,000.[25] More forces were brought in to cope with the crisis and Lt Gen. A.A.K. Niazi, Commander of the Eastern Command in 1971 from April to December, wrote: 'The total fighting strength available to me was forty-five thousand—34,000 from the army, plus 11,000 from CAF and West Pakistan civilian police and armed non-combatants'. Out of the 34,000 regular troops, 23,000 were infantry, the rest being armour, artillery, engineers, signals and other ancillary units.[26]

How did 34,000 army personnel plus 11,000 civilian police and other armed personnel, a total of 45,000 men, more than double into '93,000 soldiers' who were reported taken prisoner by India in December? According to Gen. Niazi:

> The strength of the Pakistani Army was 34,000 troops; Rangers, scouts, militia and civil police came to 11,000, thus the grand total came to 45,000. If we include naval and air force detachments and all those in uniform and entitled to free rations, e.g., HQ, MLA, depots, training institutes, workshops, factories, nurses and lady doctors, non-combatants like barbers, cooks, shoemakers, and sweepers, even then the total comes to 55,000 and not 96,000 or 100,000. The remaining were civilian officials, civilian staff, and women and children.[27]

So it appears that while the total figure in Indian custody is about right, to state that '93,000 soldiers' were taken prisoner is wrong, and creates confusion by greatly inflating the Pakistani fighting force in East Pakistan.

There were other numbers related to prisoners of war that usually go unnoticed—the numbers of Pakistani POWs held by India since early 1971. Lt Ataullah Shah of 27 Baloch, who was captured in Kushtia and handed over to

India in early April, told me that he saw sixty to eighty West Pakistani officers and other ranks already in custody when he was moved to Panagarh. Among Pakistani prisoners in India since March were the commanding officer of 4 East Bengal Regiment, Lt Col. Khizr Hayat, and other West Pakistani officers of that unit, who had not been killed by the rebel Bengali second-in-command Major Khaled Musharraf, but taken into custody and handed over to India. Twenty-five West Pakistani trainees in the Sarda police academy in Rajshahi were captured and handed over to the Indian Border Security Force on 11 April, according to villagers in Thanapara.[28]

'Genocide of three million': the ultimate word-number combination, The ultimate 'word-number' combination of the 1971 war is the assertion by Bangladeshi nationalists, believed by people around the world including Indians and many Pakistanis, that the Pakistan army committed 'genocide' of 'three million Bengalis' during 1971. In the dominant narrative of the 1971 war, the Pakistan army in this context is assumed to be entirely made up of West Pakistani personnel, and the victims are assumed to be ethnic Bengalis, the majority inhabitants of the rebel province. The 'three million' allegedly killed are referred to usually as 'innocent Bengalis', suggesting that they were non-combatants, killed solely on the basis of their ethno-linguistic identity.

I started the research for this study from this premise, as it was embedded in the narrative with which I had grown up and was part of my own memories of 1971 as a child in Calcutta. I expected the figure of 'three million' to be an approximation, but a ballpark figure. I also assumed that it was an estimate based on some form of accounting of the established realities on the ground.

Examination of the available material on the 1971 war in both Bengali and English showed that while the allegation of 'genocide' of 'three million Bengalis' is often made—in books, articles, newspapers, films and websites—it is not based on any accounting or survey on the ground. Sisson and Rose state that the figure of three million dead was put out by India, while some Bangladeshi sources say it was the figure announced on his return to Dhaka by Sheikh Mujib, who in turn had been 'told' that was the death toll when he emerged from nine months in prison in West Pakistan. It is unclear who 'told' Sheikh Mujib this and on what basis. However, Sheikh Mujib's public announcement of 'three million dead' after his return to the newly created Bangladesh was reported in the media. For instance, on 11 January 1972 in *The Times* Peter Hazelhurst reported from Dhaka on Mujib's emotional home-coming: in his first public rally in independent Bangladesh Mujib is reported to have said, 'I discovered that they had killed three million of my people'.[29]

There are reports that having publicly stated that three million Bengalis had been killed—on the basis of what he had apparently been 'told' after his release from imprisonment—Sheikh Mujib tried to establish the necessary evidence for it by setting up a committee of inquiry in January 1972.[30] No further information appears to be available on the work of the inquiry committee or its findings. None of the popular assertions of three million Bengalis allegedly killed by the army cites any official report.

The claim of three million dead or variations thereof was repeated in South Asian and Western academia and media for decades without verification. In an early comment on the war appended to her study of the alienation of East Pakistan, Rounaq Jahan wrote of 'savage brutalities of the Pakistan army and the genocidal nature of their killings', and stated, 'Between one and three million people were reportedly killed during the nine-month struggle'.[31] No source or reference was cited for the figures. Thirty years later, in a single reference to the 1971 conflict in East Pakistan in her Pulitzer Prize-winning book *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*, Samantha Power asserted, 'Beginning in March 1971, ... Pakistani troops killed between one and two million Bengalis and raped some 200,000 girls and women'. No source or reference was cited for this assertion.[32] As Sisson and Rose commented, 'India had, of course, a good case to make in terms of Pakistani atrocities in East Pakistan, and it found the foreign press incredibly gullible in accepting, without effort at verifying, the substantial exaggerations that were appended to the list of horror stories from Dhaka'.[33]

While the 'three million' figure has been repeated without substantiation by many, the occasional outside observer did notice the rather conspicuous gap between claims and actual evidence. In a report published in *The Guardian* entitled 'The Missing Millions' on 6 June 1972, William Drummond wrote, 'This figure of three million deaths, which the Sheikh has repeated several times since he returned to Bangladesh in early January, has been carried uncritically in sections of the world press. Through repetition such a claim gains a validity of its own and gradually evolves from assertion to fact needing no attribution. My judgment, based on numerous trips around Bangladesh and extensive discussions with many people at the village level as well as in the government, is that the three million deaths figure is an exaggeration so gross as to be absurd'.[34]

In a striking parallel to Kissinger's comment in April 1971 about Bengali claims of a thousand bodies in graves when fewer than twenty bodies could be found, Drummond wrote in June 1972, 'Of course, there are 'mass graves' all

over Bangladesh. But nobody, not even the most rabid Pakistani-hater, has yet asserted that all these mass graves account for more than about 1,000 victims. Furthermore, because a body is found in a mass grave does not necessarily mean that the victim was killed by the Pakistani Army'.

As the earlier chapters indicate, my own experience in Bangladesh was very similar, with claims of dead in various incidents wildly exceeding anything that could be reasonably supported by evidence on the ground. 'Killing fields' and 'mass graves' were claimed to be everywhere, but none was forensically exhumed and examined in a transparent manner, not even the one in Dhaka University. Moreover, as Drummond pointed out in 1972, the finding of someone's remains cannot clarify, unless scientifically demonstrated, whether the person was Bengali or non-Bengali, combatant or non-combatant, whether death took place in the 1971 war, or whether it was caused by the Pakistan Army. Ironically, as Drummond also points out, the Pakistan Army did kill, but the Bangladeshi claims were 'blown wholly out of proportion', undermining their credibility. Drummond reported that field investigations by the Home Ministry of Bangladesh in 1972 had turned up about 2,000 complaints of deaths at the hands of the Pakistan Army.

Under the circumstances, the number 'three million' appears to be nothing more than a gigantic rumour. Until and unless credible accounting can be produced to substantiate it, scholars and commentators must cease repeating it. Also, until and unless casualty figures estimated on the basis of some form of credible and transparent accounting are released from official archives of the concerned governments, no other number can be offered as the estimate of the dead.

On the Pakistani side, the Hamoodur Rehman Commission, set up after the war by the new government of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto to inquire into Pakistan's defeat in the war, did submit a report, de-classified parts of which were published in Pakistan. The Hamoodur Rehman Commission's comment on the claim of three million dead is as follows: 'According to the Bangladesh authorities, the Pakistan Army was responsible for killing three million Bengalis and raping 200,000 East Pakistani women. It does not need any elaborate argument to see that these figures are obviously highly exaggerated. So much damage could not have been caused by the entire strength of the Pakistan Army then stationed in East Pakistan, even if it had nothing else to do'.[35]

Calling the claims by Dhaka 'altogether fantastic and fanciful', the Commission presented its own estimate of the dead: '... the latest statement supplied to us by the GHQ shows approximately 26,000 persons killed during action by

the Pakistan Army. This figure is based on the situation reports submitted from time to time by the Eastern Command to General Headquarters'.

The Hamoodur Rehman Commission thought the estimate of 26,000 dead might be biased, but biased upwards: 'It is possible that even these figures may contain an element of exaggeration, as the lower formations may have tended to magnify their own achievement in quelling the rebellion'. The Commission accepted the figure of 26,000 dead as 'reasonably correct', given the 'absence of any other reliable data' and on account of 'the fact that the reports were sent from East Pakistan to GHQ at a time when the army officers in East Pakistan could have had no notion whatsoever of any accountability in this behalf'.[36]

On the basis of the claims made by the two sides of the Pakistani civil war, therefore, we are left with a range of war-dead between 26,000, the figure based on situation reports of the Pakistan Army submitted to the Pakistani inquiry commission, and the Bangladeshi/Indian claim of three million, based on—nothing. A meaningless range by any standards, it is rendered farcical by the elimination of the three million figure as an assertion without any accountable basis.

In the course of their systematic research on the 1971 conflict, Sisson and Rose attempted to tackle the question of how many had actually died in the war. They wrote:

> India set the number of victims of Pakistani atrocities at three million, and this is still the figure usually cited. We interviewed two Indian officials who had held responsible positions on the issue of Bangladesh in 1971. When questioned about the actual number of deaths in Bangladesh in 1971 attributable to the civil war, one replied 'about 300,000'. Then when he received a disapproving glance from his colleague, he changed this to '300,000 to 500,000'.[37]

The impression left by this exchange is that the Indian officials were still citing figures off the top of their heads without any supporting accounting basis, and that their motivation was still to cite as large a number as possible. By this logic that official's initial figure of 300,000 was also an 'exaggerated' figure, but not large enough for the disapproving colleague, hence the further inflation to a possible 500,000. Neither figure is supported by any accounting on the ground, and both must necessarily be rejected.

Sisson and Rose raise another important consideration with regard to the number of dead (whatever that figure might be): '... it is still impossible to get anything like reliable estimates as to (1) how many of these were 'liberation fighters' killed in combat, (2) how many were Bihari Muslims and supporters

of Pakistan killed by Bengali Muslims, and (3) how many were killed by Pakistani, Indian, or Mukti Bahini fire and bombing during the hostilities. One thing is clear—the atrocities did not just go one way, though Bengali Muslims and Hindus were certainly the main victims'.[38]

Indeed, as earlier chapters have shown, many of the dead during the conflict were non-Bengali victims of Bengali ethnic hatred. Of the corpses reported littering the land and clogging up the rivers, many would have been Bihari—this would be especially true where the victims were men, women and children, as Bengali mobs appear to have killed non-Bengalis indiscriminately while the Pakistan Army appeared to target adult Bengali men. There is no reliable breakdown of the casualties into Bengali and non-Bengali. It is also hard to distinguish between combatant and non-combatant casualties as so many combatants on the Bangladeshi side were civilians (or in civilian attire). While some non-combatant civilians were killed in deliberate massacres as recounted in incidents in this study, many civilians also perished in crossfire or bombings. Realistically, it is no longer possible to apportion the dead reliably into any categories—Bengali or non-Bengali, combatant or non-combatant, deliberate targeting or so-called 'collateral damage'.

A further complication is that deaths in the conflict were unevenly spread over time and space. As indicated by the earlier chapters, most of the deaths were likely to have occurred at the beginning of the armed conflict—in March-April—and at the end during open war between India and Pakistan, in November-December. Some villages, like Satiarchora, Thanapara or Chuknagar, experienced a single major incident during the year, while other villages remained relatively incident-free. It is not possible therefore to take a death toll from a particular week or district and extrapolate to find a total.

The only precise body-counts are available from the armed forces and even they are not really as precise as they seem. According to Lt Gen. J.F.R. Jacob of the Indian Army, the casualties on the Indian side (in December only) were 1,421 killed, 4,058 wounded and fifty-six missing, presumed killed. Given India's involvement in the conflict from much earlier in the year, and many Pakistani and Bangladeshi claims of Indian casualties prior to December, the actual number of Indian casualties is an unknown, but higher number. According to Jacob, the Indian assessment of Pakistani losses was as follows: between 26 March and 3 December, 4,500 killed and 4,000 wounded; from 4 to 16 December, 2,261 killed and 4,000 wounded, leading to a total of 6,761 killed and 8,000 wounded.[39] Gen. Niazi's account confirmed that by 3 December, the Pakistani forces in East Pakistan had suffered about 4,000 dead and the same number wounded, if not more.[40]

Some of the instances of inflation (or deflation) captured by this study indicate the scale of the problem of numbers. The White Paper of the Pakistan government listed gruesome cases of brutalisation and murder by Bengali nationalists and claimed that more than 100,000 men, women and children had been killed by Bengalis during the 'Awami League reign of terror' started on 1 March 1971.[41] It would be logical to assume that the White Paper might tend to inflate the number of victims of Bengali nationalist violence, just as Bengali nationalist claims out the number of victims of the Pakistan Army are exaggerated. However, as the case-studies of Khulna in Chapter 4 and Chapter 8 demonstrate, non-Bengali men, women and children massacred by Bengali nationalists ran into thousands of casualties per incident. Hence the total number of dead among the 'Bihari' population would easily run into tens of thousands.

The warring parties do not necessarily minimise how many they killed. Both sides have the incentive to claim to have inflicted higher casualties on the 'enemy', to inflate their own 'achievements'. The weeks following the start of the military action witnessed serious blood-letting with heavy casualties on both sides. As Chapter 4 has shown, about 144 members of the Pakistan armed forces were killed by Bengali attackers in Kushtia in a protracted battle and subsequent ambushes. However, the claim that pro-liberation fighters caught unawares at Satiarchora in Tangail inflicted a loss of 200–250 soldiers in a matter of minutes before being crushed seems highly exaggerated.

An Associated Press photographer, who evaded deportation from Dhaka for a couple of days after the start of the military action on 25–26 March, reported that 200 students were reported killed in Iqbal hall (in Dhaka University).[42] As discussed in Chapter 3, one of the key army officers in charge of the operation in Dhaka that night told me that the number of dead at Iqbal hall was twelve and that at Jagannath hall was thirty-two. From the witness accounts discussed in that chapter, it appears that the casualty figure at the university might range from around seventy, including those forced to carry the corpses and shot afterwards, to 300 as claimed by the commanding officer of the regiment executing the action at the university. The university's memorial lists 149 war-dead for the whole year, contradicting the initial press report.

Similarly, as discussed in Chapter 4, the army attack on Shankharipara, a Hindu area in old Dhaka, on 26 March left 14–15 men and one child dead according to eye-witnesses and survivors whom I interviewed; but a prominent Pakistani journalist reported that 8,000 people had been killed there. The evidence assembled in Chapter 6 on the killing of Hindu refugees at

Chuknagar indicates that a large-scale massacre—perhaps with hundreds dead—occurred there on 20 May. This is still not enough for some locals and Bangladeshi academics, who aspire to establish this incident as the 'biggest mass killing' of the year, by claiming—implausibly—that 10,000 people were killed there by a platoon of soldiers with just their personal weapons in a morning's operation.

From the available evidence discussed in this study, it appears possible to estimate with reasonable confidence that at least 50,000–100,000 people perished in the conflict in East Pakistan/Bangladesh in 1971, including combatants and non-combatants, Bengalis and non-Bengalis, Hindus and Muslims, Indians and Pakistanis. Casualty figures crossing one hundred thousand are within the realm of the possible, but beyond that one enters a world of meaningless speculation.

A culture of victimhood and violence. Regardless of the number of dead, whether the deaths during the 1971 conflict were 'genocidal' in nature is a separate question. The crime of 'genocide' is not based on the numbers killed, but on whether victims were targeted on the basis of nationality, ethnicity, race or religion. The international community defined 'genocide' in the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948, according to which:

> genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religions group, as such:
>
> (a) Killing members of the group;
> (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
> (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
> (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
> (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The allegation that the Pakistan Army killed Bengalis in a 'genocidal' manner runs into several problems. To begin with, virtually all of the population of about seventy million in East Pakistan was Bengali. Defining the 'target' population as 'Bengali' therefore is a non-starter. As the rebels fighting for an independent Bangladesh were Bengalis in an overwhelmingly Bengali province, it is hardly a surprise that those killed by the Pakistan Army in its bid to put down the rebellion would be Bengalis.

As the instances in this study show, the Pakistan Army was clearly not killing all Bengalis even in the worst instances of massacres such as those at Thana-

para, Chuknagar and Boroitola. There appears to have been a pattern of targeting adult men while sparing women and children, starting with the military action in Dhaka University on 25–26 March through the duration of the conflict. In Dhaka University, non-Bengali male staff members were also killed. Nor were all adult Bengali men the target of army action. Some Bengali men were active supporters of the regime—termed 'Razakars' by the pro-liberation Bengalis. Many others were not active on either side and the vast majority of such men survived the war, even if they were picked up and interrogated along with real insurgents such as the Dhaka guerrilla groups. However, Hindu men appear to have been more likely to be presumed to be insurgents solely on the basis of their religion.

Hence the available evidence indicates that the Pakistan Army committed political killings; where the victims were suspected to be secessionists in cahoots with the arch-enemy India and thus 'traitorous'. Extra-judicial political killings in non-combat situations, however brutal and deserving of condemnation, do not fit the UN definition of 'genocide', whether in East Pakistan in 1971 or in other instances of large-scale political killings elsewhere in the world. However, to identify their targets—secessionist rebels—in situations other than straight combat, the Pakistan army used proxies, or 'profiling' as it is called in current usage: sometimes the proxy might have been political affiliation (membership of Awami League, for instance), but at other times the proxies appear to have been age (adult), gender (male) and religion (Hindu). It is the latter proxies, in particular the disproportionate probability of being presumed to be an insurgent on the basis of religion—Hinduism—that led the army into killings that may have been 'political' in motivation, but could be termed 'genocidal' by their nature.

Yet many Hindus were also left unharmed by the Pakistan army during 1971. As the witness accounts in Chapter 6 show, many Hindu refugees were leaving their villages and fleeing to India not because of any action of the army, but because they could no longer bear the persecution by their Bengali Muslim neighbours. Much of the harassment of Hindus by their fellow-Bengalis appears to have been non-political, motivated by material greed. The intimidation, killing and hounding out of Hindus—whether by the army or by Bengali Muslims—amounted to what has later come to be termed 'ethnic cleansing'.

While the Pakistan Army's political killings turned 'genocidal' when religious 'profiling' was used for the selection of victims, the killing of non-Bengalis—Biharis and West Pakistanis—by Bengalis was clearly 'genocide' under the UN definition. As many instances in this study show, many Bengali Mus-

lims in East Pakistan committed 'genocide' and 'ethnic cleansing' of non-Bengali Muslims and Bengali and non-Bengali Hindus, as the victims were targeted on the basis of ethnicity or religion.

The 'liberation literature' of Bangladesh repeatedly uses the words 'genocide', 'holocaust', or 'concentration camp' in their depiction of 1971 in blissful disregard of the need to provide substantiation, in an obvious attempt to benefit from the association with the horrors of Nazi Germany. The need for 'millions' dead appears to have become part of a morbid competition with six million Jews to obtain the attention and sympathy of the international community. The persistent cultivation of a 'victim culture' glides effortlessly through allegations of exploitation by West Pakistan, 'genocide' in 1971, neglect by an uncaring world and further exploitation by India, the erstwhile liberators.

It is important to emphasise that there is no comparison between the 1971 conflict in East Pakistan and the real Holocaust—the systematic extermination of millions of European Jews, other minorities and political dissidents by the Nazis and their allies during the Second World War. Such careless references are an insult to the victims of the Nazi Holocaust as well as the casualties of the 1971 conflict, who do not require their suffering to be grossly exaggerated or distorted in order to be taken seriously.

When the (Pakistan) army came for Sheikh Mujib on the night of 25–26 March 1971 he was apprehensive; the soldiers arrested and imprisoned him, accusing him of treason. When soldiers of the (Bangladesh) army came for Sheikh Mujib on 15 August 1975 he went to meet them as they were his own people; they killed him and all his extended family present, including his wife, two daughters-in-law, and three sons, the youngest a child of ten.

Ultimately, neither the numbers nor the labels matter. What matters is the nature of the conflict, which was fundamentally a complex and violent struggle for power among several different parties with a terrible human toll. The war of 1971 left a land of violence, with a legacy of intolerance of difference and a tendency to respond to political opposition with intimidation, brutalisation and extermination.

APPENDIX 1

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

This study is based substantially on fieldwork and interviews in Bangladesh and Pakistan, with additional work in the UK and the USA. Lists of interviewees are given in Appendix 2 and direct references are cited in the text. This note provides brief explanatory comments on the range and nature of the available published material consulted in English and Bengali.

There was little dispassionate scholarly work on the 1971 conflict in the thirty-five years that followed. Most of the published material on the war—in English and Bengali—consists of personal accounts and views of those directly involved in the conflict, or commentary by those with strong partisan leanings one way or the other. They are not systematic attempts to unearth and present facts and perspectives from all sides, or to address research questions. On the other hand, many of the key players have not published personal accounts.

This note starts with a description of the few research-based scholarly works by individuals not directly involved with the war. This is followed by remarks on government documents consulted. Then the personal memoirs and commentary are considered, in sub-sections. Some of these works are commentaries by writers partisan to one side or the other, who are expounding views or making a partisan argument, not presenting material based on systematic research or enquiry with an open mind. The rest are largely descriptive personal accounts by individuals directly involved in the conflict, which should be treated as primary data even if the material is sometimes mixed with commentary unrelated to the incident being recounted. Media material is not included here—it is cited with references in the text of the book.

The purpose of this note is to give the reader a good idea of the range and nature of available published material so far, in particular to highlight the pau-

city of dispassionate accounts and research-based analysis. It groups publications around common features or problems. It is not meant to be a comprehensive review of each publication.

Non-participant Scholarly Works

Any discussion of the existing scholarly work on the 1971 conflict must start with Richard Sisson and Leo Rose's *War and Secession: Pakistan, India and the Creation of Bangladesh* (1990). This is the only comprehensive and systematically researched book on the 1971 conflict largely based on new primary data generated by impartial and highly respected scholars. It is simply a must-read for anyone interested in the subject. It studies the conflict at the level of policy and policy-makers, and is based substantially on interviews with the major players in all the countries involved—Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and the United States—conducted in the 1970s, as well as archival material in the United States. The study both reconstructs the events and decisions of 1971 for the record and analyses these events and processes with a view to understanding the multiple wars of that year, the civil war and the inter-state war. Sisson and Rose's research on 1971 and the data it generated are invaluable for contemporary South Asian studies. As most of their interviewees have since passed away, it is impossible to replicate. Sisson and Rose's book presents a very different narrative of the conflict from the dominant popular narratives in India and Bangladesh, or the versions from Pakistan.

Wayne Wilcox's *The Emergence of Bangladesh* focuses on lessons to be learnt in terms of future US policy in South Asia. Published by the American Enterprise Institute in 1973, it is an early analytical comment on the events of 1971. Wilcox, professor of government and member of the Southern Asia Institute at Columbia University, provides a concise summary and analysis of the 1971 conflict before discussing US policy options for the 1970s. It is a cogent analysis with some interesting arguments, the broad thrust being roughly along the same lines as Sisson and Rose's detailed research some years later.

Robert Jackson, fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, visited India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in the spring of 1972 and wrote *South Asian Crisis*, published in 1975 for the International Institute for Strategic Studies. A largely descriptive study of the conflict, it narrates the events in South Asia and the ways in which great powers and great power rivalries got enmeshed in the crisis. The broad thrust of the story is similar to that of the other Western scholarly works, though they do differ in some details and emphases. The final chapter arrives

at similar conclusions with regard to events on the ground—for example, that the deliberate interventions by India were the determining factor in the outcome—and the nature of great power involvement (noting, for example, the essentially reactive approach of outside powers to the crisis).

There are some publications, scholarly in their approach, written by individuals not directly involved in the conflict itself but with close connections to one or the other side. These are works of substance and a positive addition to the study of the war, but appear to be vulnerable to a partisan slant, or to being perceived as tinged with a partisan slant in some way. Of three authors one could group in this category, one is Bangladeshi, the second Pakistani and the third British.

The Bangladeshi academic is Rounaq Jahan, whose book *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration* (1972) has an epilogue entitled 'The disintegration of Pakistan and the birth of Bangladesh'. As is evident from the publication date and indeed plainly stated in the synopsis of the book, Jahan's is a study of Bengali alienation in the period leading up to 1971, in particular the impact of the policies of the Ayub era. It obviously could not be a researched study of 1971 itself, but a summarising epilogue appears to have been added in response to the force of events. Three-quarters of the epilogue comprises a brief and balanced analysis of events since 1969—the different approach of Yahya in contrast to Ayub in terms of his recognition of the necessity of politics and politicians, his conciliatory policies, concessions to Bengali demands, and the successful general election of 1970. It places the responsibility for the post-election crisis of 1971 on Bhutto. However, in the final section, on the nine-month conflict, it appears to slip into the familiar mould of the popular narrative, without the benefit of any considered research, weakening the arguments. This is particularly true of its depiction of the role of Bangladeshi 'freedom fighters' in war-fighting, limiting the involvement of India only to the final phase, and alleging 'savage brutalities of the Pakistan army and the genocidal nature of their killings' along with the now familiar claim of '[b]etween one and three million people were reportedly killed during the nine-month struggle'.

Kamal Matinuddin, a Lieutenant-General in the Pakistan army who was later the Director-General of the Institute of Strategic Studies in Islamabad, takes on Jahan directly on the issue of alleged discrimination against Bengalis—which is a separate and distinct debate—in *Tragedy of Errors: East Pakistan Crisis 1968–71* (1993). On the conflict itself Matinuddin makes an important contribution, with considerable research, data and analysis, a fair

amount of it critical of the army's actions or the regime's policies. Yet, given that he is a general of the Pakistan Army, Matinuddin could never be seen as truly independent, and some of the emphasis—for example on the role of Hindu students, the violence against non-Bengalis, the alleged plot for an armed uprising by the Awami League, and the longstanding involvement of India in fomenting trouble in East Pakistan—would make him seem even less so.

L.F. Rushbrook Williams, a British historian, civil servant and journalist, wrote *The East Pakistan Tragedy* while the conflict was still going on in 1971, because he was puzzled by the way the crisis appeared to have been presented to the world. As someone who knew the region well, he based the book on three visits to East and West Pakistan at the time. Rushbrook Williams was a knowledgeable outsider and there is no *a priori* reason to expect his book to favour any particular side in the conflict. Indeed it contains much useful information and insightful questions and observations. The book strongly defends the Pakistani regime and the army against what Rushbrook Williams considers unfair or false depictions of events, whether concerning the regime's handling of the natural disasters, post-election negotiations or military action. He terms the massacres committed by Awami League militants as the 'true genocide' and decries what he considers false rumours about the army. His acknowledged access to Yahya Khan, and the relatively uncritical view of the regime's White Paper and its efforts at political and economic reconstruction, may be interpreted by some as a tilt in Pakistan's favour, especially in the context of his strong criticism of the Awami League, India—and a gullible Western press.

There are occasional mentions of some aspects of the 1971 conflict in South Asia in broader studies of war and international relations. One example is the discussion of battle deaths in international wars in Obermeyer *et al.* in the *British Medical Journal* (2008), with reference to the armed conflict dataset maintained by the Uppsala University and the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo. Regarding the 1971 war, this study argues that the Oslo dataset's estimate of 58,000 battle deaths is an underestimate of war dead, and aims to amend the number upwards to 269,000 (with a range of 125,000 to 505,000).

Government Documents

The US State Department released official documents related to the crisis in 1971 as 'South Asia Crisis, 1971' in volume XI of the series *Foreign Relations*

of the United States, 1969–1976 (2005). This is a treasure trove of documented discussions within the Nixon administration during the crisis and provides important archival material for research into any number of aspects of the United States' response to the conflict.

The limited amount of official documents available from South Asian countries is disappointing and unreliable for various reasons. The Pakistan government published a *White Paper on the Crisis in East Pakistan* in August 1971. It presents the government's view of the post-election negotiations, along with day-by-day details of the alleged reign of terror by the Awami League in March 1971, a chapter on India's role in the crisis, and a list of 'major atrocities' committed by Bengali rebels after 25 March 1971. The disadvantage is that it is the official version of the regime, presenting a particular political view, so that the content requires independent corroboration before general acceptance as credible evidence. The advantage is that the details provided of dates, places and specific events make it possible for researchers to attempt corroboration, particularly as documents from other parties become available in the future. Major General Shaukat Riza's account of the Pakistan Army (1966–71) also suffers from the problem of being an insider's view from one of the principal warring parties, written under the patronage of the then military ruler, General Zia-ul Haq. However, it too has many details of dates, places, events and deployments which are useful to scholars.

The report of the Hamoodur Rehman Commission 'as declassified by the Government of Pakistan' and published by Vanguard Books is potentially useful to a limited extent, but deeply problematic. First, there are persistent rumours that this published version may not be the full version of the Commission's report. But more important are the problems posed by the limited remit of the Commission, its lack of a credible degree of independence, and the poor standard of its alleged 'evidence' and analysis. Much of what is presented as 'evidence' in this publication is actually 'allegations', without the benefit of the defendants' responses or cross-examination of testimony of the accusers and witnesses. The procedure and organisation seem haphazard, and the predictable outcome is primarily the heaping of opprobrium on a small number of individuals, primarily General Yahya and General Niazi, both of whom were easy targets given their predicament at the time of the inquiry, and the complete exoneration—even from being investigated—of others, including senior army officers such as General Tikka Khan and General Farman Ali and politicians such as Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, who was then in power. To be fair, the Commission called for the public trial and court-martial of several persons

including Generals Yahya and Niazi, both of whom themselves demanded that they be given the opportunity of such a trial. However, no trial or court-martial took place, and this removed any possibility of due process or the unearthing of reliable evidence in the entire matter. All these problems rob the document of credibility and reliability.

The Bangladesh government published fifteen volumes of documents entitled *History of the War of Independence*. They include volumes on the historical background going back to the partition of Bengali in 1905. There is much in these volumes that would be of interest to researchers examining various aspects of the Bengali nationalist movement and the events of 1971. However, the volumes suffer from two fundamental problems—general editorial weakness and partisan point of view—which undermine their reliability and render them only of partial usefulness. There is one volume containing a collection of material issued by the Pakistan regime, but the collection as a whole does not attempt to present a comprehensive documentation of all views or experiences in East Pakistan. There is considerable material that is partisan commentary. The documents included vary widely in importance or relevance, the material seems overwhelmingly in favour of a particular viewpoint, and known material including news reports that differ from the story-line appears to have been left out.

Non-participant Commentary

There are some books and articles by journalists or authors who were not directly involved in the conflict or in the events they are writing about, but whose publications are not dispassionate reporting, nor the analysis of a neutral observer. This is because the authors either have close connections to one of the warring parties or have come to espouse a viewpoint, which is expressed through their writing.

One of the most notable writers of this genre is Anthony Mascarenhas, the Pakistani journalist who became famous for escaping to Britain and writing an exposé in the *Sunday Times* condemning the military action in East Pakistan. Mascarenhas had seen the aftermath of the military action first-hand as part of a group of Pakistani journalists who were taken to the territory by the government in April 1971. Mascarenhas' report in the *Sunday Times* was a chilling account of a trigger-happy military let loose to crush a political rebellion. It also records savagery by both sides of the civil war then raging in East Pakistan. Mascarenhas expanded on his initial report in his book, *The Rape of*

Bangladesh, published in October that year. The book is of mixed usefulness. Mascarenhas' outrage at the military action is easy to sympathise with. But other assertions seem emotional, weakened by lack of supporting material and contradicted by uninvolved scholars. As pointed out in this study, some descriptions of events he did not witness first-hand have been shown later to be entirely inaccurate. In the book Mascarenhas also convinced himself that despite holding the first free and fair elections in the country and facilitating the protracted post-election negotiations among the politicians, Yahya Khan never intended to hand over power to the winners, the Awami League. This is a familiar theme in some of the theories about the conflict, but Mascarenhas does not provide any compelling evidence to support it and more dispassionate analysts, such as the scholars cited above, have come to different conclusions. He also glossed over the implications of the Six Points and escalating Awami League demands, and admitted to his personal friendship with Sheikh Mujib as the basis for analysing the Bengali leader's actions.

The strong identification with the Bengali liberation movement and the desire to condemn the military regime make the book a polemical exercise on behalf of particular stances. There are however many contradictions. The chapter on the month of March undermines some of Mascarenhas' own positions. He is critical of Mujib's willingness to negotiate, in contrast to the more radical elements of the movement including Bengali officers of the army. The word 'genocide' is used in connection with the military action without explanation of why that might be appropriate, and some of the reports of 'atrocities' mentioned turned out later to be highly exaggerated or distorted. In his later book *Bangladesh: A Legacy of Blood* (1986), Mascarenhas described the decade of coups and assassinations following the creation of Bangladesh. He blamed Mujib, Khondakar Mushtaq Ahmed and General Ziaur Rahman equally for betraying the hopes of the new country—this time he compared Mujib's private army to the Nazi Brownshirts.

Another book rushed to publication while the conflict was still on was the journalist David Loshak's *Pakistan Crisis* (1971). The author confessed that it was a journalistic work, not an academic study, but did not restrict himself to matters of which he had first-hand knowledge as a correspondent in South Asia. He makes no apologies for his opinions, but such works, written without the depth of knowledge or verification of claims from either side while the conflict still raged, do little to promote understanding. Another work often cited is Lawrence Lifshultz's *Bangladesh: The Unfinished Revolution* (1979), but this book is about the coups and counter-coups of 1975, and its own com-

plex tale of conspiracies (with the description of key events contradicted by Mascarenhas' account, and some of the conspiracy theories countered by Sisson and Rose's reading of the same documents).

Among Bengali published accounts, some appear to be considered studies or eye-witness testimony but are in fact politically partisan narratives which need to be read on that understanding. For instance, Moidul Hasan's account of the war (1985, 1992) is that of an insider of the Bengali liberation movement and its 'government in exile' in India. Neelima Ibrahim's accounts, whether her recounting of her personal experiences (1989) or her fictionalised telling of the experience of seven Bengali women (1998, 2001), are works by someone within the Bangladeshi liberation movement. Other partisan accounts, which restrict themselves to personal testimony alone, are discussed in the next section. The caustic commentaries by Nirad C. Chaudhuri express opinions that run counter to the majority of his fellow-Bengalis on both sides of the border.

Blood and Tears (1974) by Qutubuddin Aziz is primarily a collection of the testimony of non-Bengali survivors of alleged massacres and atrocities committed by Bengalis against the non-Bengali civilian population of East Pakistan. There is also some commentary, this time from an involved party on the Pakistan government side. These accounts mirror the allegations of atrocities by the Bangladeshi nationalist side of the conflict. Publications like the polemical *Behind the Myth of Three Million* (1996) by M. Abdul Mu'min Chowdhury, a former academic at Dhaka University, are hard to authenticate as currently published, but contain details that can be scrutinised in Bangladesh if and when relevant documents become available.

Participant Accounts

The largest body of published material on 1971 so far, in Bengali and English, consists of personal memoirs, from short statements to entire books. These provide vital source material, but they are of uneven quality and need to be cross-checked for verification and consistency. Personal accounts of the conflict by American, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi participants are available in English and there are many personal reminiscences in Bengali by Bangladeshi participants and eye-witnesses to events. All the direct personal accounts are useful in terms of learning about events from those who possess first-hand knowledge. However, they all tend to aim to justify or defend one or the other position, and so should not be taken as balanced in terms of the information provided, and whether inadvertently or deliberately, they may not always be accurate.

American. The American Consul-General in Dhaka until June 1971, Archer Blood, wrote an autobiographical account in 2002. Blood was famously sympathetic to the Bangladeshi liberation movement then, and this remains a sympathetic account, offering a fascinating glimpse into the crisis from the American diplomatic compound in Dhaka. It is an extremely useful book, for its factual details and insights as well as the revelation of constraints imposed by inability to acquire first-hand information and the distance—both geographic and analytical—from both the embassy in Islamabad and the administration in Washington. The need to rely on intermediaries led to errors which are now apparent, and there are admitted 'mistakes in judgment' along with the correct insights that Blood expresses.

The 1971 crisis appears in Kissinger's *White House Years* and Nixon's *Memoirs*, and the perspective of these two major players—and the difference between them—are critical to the understanding of US policy. Their recollections of the crisis in South Asia should be read together with those of the breakthrough with China. The 1971 war makes a surprise appearance in Chuck Yeager's autobiography—he was Defence Representative at the American embassy in Pakistan at the time and ended up in the middle of a war.

Indian. Much of the Indian commentary on 1971 is focused on the full-scale war at the end of the year and the victory in East Pakistan. However, most of the key actors on the Indian side seem not to have written directly about their experience, including the commander of the Eastern theatre and the divisional commander whose units are deemed to have performed the best. Only a few publications, such as Lt Gen. J.F.R. Jacob's *Surrender at Dacca* (2001), are the testimony of direct participants. Maj. Gen. Sukhwant Singh's book on the 1971 war was conceived as part of a three-volume study of India's military performance since independence. Maj. Gen. Lachhman Singh's account is based on discussions with the combat participants, none of whom had recorded their experiences. The preoccupation among Indian writers is with the 'hot war' and arguments over details of war-fighting, which makes them less useful for this study. A striking feature of these books is the differences within the Indian military and the harsh criticism by Indian officers of one another, even while recounting a famous victory.

Pakistani. General A.A.K. Niazi wrote *The Betrayal of East Pakistan* (1998), which means that the experience and perspective of the Pakistani commander of the Eastern theatre is on record. Though General Niazi served in East Pakistan from April 1971, there is perhaps inevitably an emphasis in the book on

the final weeks of the conflict and details of battle plans and war-fighting. There is also a predictably defensive current throughout, given that the motivation for writing the book was the deep sense of injustice felt by the author about the manner in which he had been treated in his own country after the war and the need to set the record straight, as it were. Nevertheless the book is invaluable as the account of a major actor in the conflict and its many details provide ample material for comparison with other sources.

Several other Pakistan army officers have written personal accounts of the 1971 conflict. Some are published as books, others as articles, and yet others remain unpublished. As with the Indian officers, the Pakistan army officers have many differences among themselves on specific battle plans and the conduct of the war with India at the end of the year. But the accounts of those who served in East Pakistan during the conflict are valuable for reconstructing and analysing the events on the ground. The autobiography of Maj. Gen. A.O. Mitha (2003) includes 1971 in the fuller story of his life. It is characteristically blunt and while not everyone may agree with his specific views the straight talk is refreshing, and the account of events very helpful. Maj. Gen. H.A. Qureshi's book focuses on 1971 only and is a soldierly account of a commander on the ground throughout the conflict. One wishes that there were more such accounts from those who served in command positions in the field that year.

One who decided by March 1971 that he could no longer serve, Sahabzada Yaqub Khan, has allowed his telegrams from that time to express his analysis and explain his actions (2005). The diaries of Ayub Khan (2007) give the personal views of the former military ruler, who did not at the time have the benefit of full or accurate information. The memoirs of civil servants like Roedad Khan (2004) are instructive for the pen pictures they provide of the events they witnessed.

Among published articles Brigadier Muhammad Hayat's (1998) is an instructive first-hand account of the experiences of a unit that was holding out against the Indian army while the surrender was taking place. A similar bewilderment at the order to surrender, in a different location, is found in Maj. Gen. Qureshi's account. Articles in the form of interviews such as Brigadier Taj's (2002) also contain information from the experience of a commander on the ground at a key moment. In many of the above instances I built on the published material in my direct interviews with the authors. In other instances the authors, such as Brigadier Karimullah and Brigadier Shaukat Qadir, kindly shared as yet unpublished material on their experience in East Pakistan.

Some of the personal accounts by Pakistani officers who were in East Pakistan in 1971 are limited in their usefulness to this study for particular reasons,

or go beyond their direct experience and include an element of commentary that is not based on first-hand knowledge of events on the ground. While they are useful for the first-hand accounts, it is necessary to be aware of their limitations, as well as contradictions from other officers. The limitation of Brigadier A.R. Siddiqi's *East Pakistan The Endgame* is indicated by its subtitle 'An Onlooker's Journal 1969–71'. While valuable as a first-hand account, it is important to keep in mind that the author was indeed an 'onlooker', both as the chief public relations officer and as someone who was based in West Pakistan, visiting Dhaka a few times at particular moments. Siddiq Salik, who wrote *Witness to Surrender* (1977), was also a public relations officer, but serving in East Pakistan. As a result there are many useful first-hand accounts in his narrative, especially about political events over the two-year period he was there. However, there are also inaccuracies on matters military—as pointed out by General Mitha, possibly inevitable when a junior officer engaged in public relations duties writes about field deployments of which he had no first-hand knowledge. Hasan Zaheer knew East Pakistan well as a civil servant who had served there for years, and returned in May 1971. However, he covers ground much beyond his direct experience in his book (2001). While correctly seeking the roots of Bengali alienation in earlier decades, he is highly critical of Yahya for the reform of the political system that actually addressed East Pakistani grievances, and for his effort to engage in a political dialogue with Mujib. Some direct experiences are mixed with a considerable amount of commentary on matters beyond first-hand knowledge.

Bangladeshi. There are a few published works by Bengalis who were in favour of a united Pakistan, or at any rate not in favour of addressing East Pakistan's grievances through secession and Awami League rule. They merit careful reading. G.W. Choudhury's *The Last Days of United Pakistan* (1974), written from the vantage point of an insider, is sensitive to Bengali grievances while presenting a well-argued defence of the Yahya regime's restoration of democracy and General Yahya's personal sincerity in the political parleys that followed. Syed Sajjad Husain's *The Wastes of Time* (1995) articulates the political views that explain why the former Vice-Chancellor of Rajshahi and Dhaka Universities stood for united Pakistan, but also provides a vivid account of his experiences of being treated as a 'collaborator' in the new Bangladesh. Begum Akhtar Imam (1998, 2002), who was the Provost of Rokeya Hall, the women's hostel at Dhaka University, in 1971, has given her account of events at the hall and the university in 1971, which is considerably at variance with the popular stories, along with her allegations of the persecution she suffered

for being labelled a 'collaborator' as well. Another 'loyalist', the Chakma chief Raja Tridiv Roy, in his autobiographical *The Departed Melody* (2003) provides a key perspective of the Chakma, at odds with the rise of militant Bengali nationalism in East Pakistan.

Bangladeshi—liberation literature. There is a vast 'liberation literature' in Bangladesh, primarily in Bengali. Some are the personal memoirs of participants in the independence movement, including both Bengali members of the armed forces who rebelled and civilians who were involved in direct or supportive roles. Many others are the recounting of traumatic incidents, by those directly affected, their family members or other eye witnesses. The reliability and usefulness of this material vary greatly, from informative accounts by participants and witnesses, or moving stories of personal pain and loss, to unreliable histrionics of dubious provenance.

The personal accounts of events by participants and witnesses serve as a valuable source of primary information. However, even the most useful of these are not without some problems. One problem is the strong politically partisan motivation which runs through the narration and inevitably affects the information provided. Another is the motivation of some of the narrators to position themselves or others in particular ways within the larger story of Bangladesh's independence, leading to further distortions. Every account therefore has to be considered in the context of the collective, which may contain either contradictory or corroborative data.

Among personal memoirs that also serve as a record of history, Jahanara Imam's journal *Ekattorer Dinguli* (1986) is a powerful narrative that has immortalised her son Rumi, who signed up to fight for Bangladesh's independence and was among the many who 'disappeared' after being arrested by the security forces. According to others within the liberation movement, while the book is movingly written not every detail in it is uncontested. Basanti Guhathakurta's book *Ekattorer Smriti* (2000) is particularly useful for the eyewitness account of the military action in Dhaka University on 25–26 March 1971 and the murder of her husband Professor Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta. The reminiscences of Professor Anisur Rahman (2001), who was her neighbour, also provide first-hand information about his experiences during the military action and subsequent exile.

A commendable effort in documenting a large number of personal reminiscences of 1971 (from the Bangladeshi liberation movement's point of view) is *Smriti 1971* in thirteen volumes, edited by Rashid Haider. These volumes contain numerous short accounts in Bengali by participants in or eye-witnesses to

a variety of events at different locations and times of the year. A similar collection of invited contributions, also in Bengali and edited by Haider, is published as *1971: Bhayabaha Abhignata* (1989). These accounts provide a vast amount of primary sources in the Bengali language. As I suggested to the editor at the time of my field research in Bangladesh, it would be helpful if at least a selection of the most important of these could be translated into English so that they are accessible to international scholars who do not read Bengali. *Shahid Buddhijeebi Koshgrantha* (1994), also edited by Haider, is a resource on Bengali professionals killed or missing in 1971.

While these collections of personal stories are a good start to the painstaking process of documentation, they suffer from some weaknesses, principally organisational laxity and lack of appropriate editorial intervention and verification. For instance, in *1971: Bhayabaha Abhignata* (1989), the testimony by key participants or witnesses, such as Nurul Ula, Kaliranjan Shil, Imamuz Zaman, Shamsher Mobin Choudhury, Jahanara Imam, Abul Barq Alvi, K.M. Safiullah, Shyamoli Choudhury and Neelima Ibrahim, is mixed in with articles by several others who do not appear to be contributing direct testimony on events or anything of additional value to that already available from key contributors. In addition there does not seem to have been an adequate authentication or verification process to filter claims made by contributors; as a result there is significant variation in the quality and reliability of contributions.

Some of the contributors have published more than once, in other collections or sole-author books. Among them are Bengali members of the Pakistani armed forces who rebelled and fought for an independent Bangladesh. They include accounts by Brigadier M.R. Mazumdar, Lt Col. Masud ul Hossain Khan, Maj. Gen. K.M. Safiullah and Maj. Gen. Imamuz Zaman. Among Muktijoddhas, Kader 'Tiger' Siddiqi's two-volume *Swadhinata '71* gives his version of the liberation war. Mahbub Alam's book (1993) is a detailed account of the guerrilla war. The personal stories of several civilian volunteers joining the Muktijoddhas can be found in the collected volumes mentioned above.

The Muktijuddha Jadughar (Liberation War Museum) in Dhaka is a relatively recent private venture to record the history of the 1971 war from the perspective of the Bangladeshi liberation movement. It houses numerous photographs, documents, possessions of freedom fighters and other items related to the war, has its own publications and serves as a focal point for the commemoration of the war. For a conflict that is in sore need of documentation, this is a well-meaning effort by a private group, but it needs to overcome two fundamental weaknesses in order to arrive at the level of credibility and reli-

ability that would be required for a resource for international research. One weakness is the organisation's overwhelming partisanship on the pro-liberation side, arguably even on the side of particular strands of the liberation movement, and continued adherence to wartime rhetoric. The other crucial weakness is the absence of a credible verification and authentication process for its exhibits and publications, which undermines its stated mission.

There is a growing body of material focusing on issues of gender and violence, an important aspect of the 1971 conflict, but one that is not the specific focus of this study. Scholarly consideration of 1971 from the perspective of women and war is still in its early stages. Studies of the 1947 partition from this perspective focused on Punjab, not Bengal, and for a long time did not extend to the second partition of 1971. The best work of this genre so far is by Yasmin Saikia (2004, 2008), whose published work also challenges the official narratives while documenting the testimony of victims and perpetrators irrespective of ethnic or political identities.

A fair amount of the writing purported to be from the Bangladeshi liberation movement perspective falls well below the standards of accuracy, verification, credibility and balance that would be necessary for it to be useful to researchers. Some of the published material (including material on the internet) hinders rather than helps the process of systematic documentation and research, and damages the credibility of the narrative of the Bangladeshi liberation movement on account of blatant partisanship, unsupported claims, a total disregard for verification and the pursuit of particular agendas. For instance, *1971 Chuknagarey Gonohotya*, edited by Muntassir Mamoon (2002), is a collection plagued by these problems, particularly disappointing as it lost a valuable opportunity to document a real massacre of civilian refugees. All of the Bengali collections of testimony mentioned above suffer to a significant degree from these problems. Some of the material that most undermines the credibility of the narrative of the Bangladeshi liberation movement is written or edited by individuals who claim to champion it, such as Shahriar Kabir (1999). Such material is repeated on the internet, compounding the problem, and fostering a culture of unsupported claims and intolerance of questioning minds.

APPENDIX 2

PARTICIPANTS AND EYE-WITNESSES INTERVIEWED

Bangladesh

- Second location in parentheses indicates the area central to the interview.
- Some interviews, as indicated, included many other witnesses present as a group in addition to the named interviewee.

Lt (Maj. Gen.) Imamuz-Zaman, Dhaka (53 Field Regiment; Muktijoddha)
Shamsher Mobin Choudhury, Washington (8 EBR; Muktijoddha)
Kabir Mia, Narsingdi (Muktijoddha)
Abul Barq Alvi, Dhaka (Muktijoddha)
Iqbal, Dhaka (Muktijoddha)
Dr Meghna Guhathakurta, Dhaka University
Rabindra Mohan Das, Dhaka University
Shyamali Nasreen Choudhury, Dhaka
Dr Abul Kalam, Dhaka
Zafar Ahmed, Washington
Zainul Karim, Dhaka (Muktijoddha)
Joynal Abedin Dewan (and wife Shiuli Abedin), Satiarchora, Tangail
Raihan Ali (and wife Mahmooda Begum Guinea), Thanapara, Rajshahi
Uyajaan, Thanapara, Rajshahi
Mohammad Abdus Sattar, Thanapara, Rajshahi
Mohammad Zinnatul Alam, Thanapara, Rajshahi
Mohammad Abdul Haq, Mymensingh
Sheikh Sultan Ahmed, Mymensingh
Abdul Aziz, Kishoreganj, Mymensingh
Muhammad Ali Akbar, Daampara, Mymensingh (Boroitola; also many other villagers)

Joynal Abedin, Boroitola, Mymensingh (Muktijoddha; also many other villagers)
Amar Sur, Shankharipara (in the presence of several others including Amar's younger brother, also an eye-witness and survivor)
Amiya Kumar Sur, Shankharipara (also Narayan Nandy and others)
Achintya Saha, Botiaghata, Khulna
Shailendra Nath Joardar, Kathamari village, Khulna (Chuknagar)
Muhammad Wajed Ali, Chuknagar (in the presence of many others, and on his own)
Daliluddin Dulu, Chuknagar
Nitai Gayen, Khulna district (Chuknagar)
Latika Gayen, Khulna district (Chuknagar)
Taradasi Bairagi, Khulna (Jhaudanga)
Moyna Mistry, Khulna (Jhaudanga)
Bimal Mandal, Khulna
Tanvir Mokammel, Dhaka (Khulna)
Tanvir Mokammel's brother's father-in-law, Khulna
S.M. Raquib Ali, Khulna (Muktijoddha, Jessore)
Rustam Ali Sikdar, Khulna (Muktijoddha)
Abdur Rab Sardar, Khulna (Muktijoddha)
Muhammad Shafi, Sabek, Pervez Alam Khan, and many others, New Colony, Khalispur
Begum Akhtar Imam, Dhaka (by telephone)

Pakistan

(Parentheses indicate later rank)

Lt Gen. Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi, Commander, Eastern Command
Maj. Gen. Ghulam Umar, Secretary, National Security Council
Sahabzada Yaqub Khan, Commander, Eastern Command till March 1971
Lt. Col. (Maj. Gen.) Hakeem Arshad Qureshi, 26 FF
Lt Col. (Brig.) Muhammad Taj, 32 Punjab
Brig. Muhammad Hayat, 107 Brigade
Brig. Saleem Zia, 8 Punjab
Capt. (Brig.) Shaukat Qadir, 13 FF
Col. (Brig.) Mansoor Shah, Station Commander, Dacca cantonment
Brig. Karimullah, POF, Ghazipur
Capt. Shujaat Latif, 15 FF

Capt. (Lt Gen.) Ali Kuli Khan Khattak, IV Army Aviation
Capt. (Major) Ikram Sehgal, 2 EBR
Lt (Lt Gen.) Ghulam Mustafa, 55 Field
Major (Col.) Anis Ahmed, 205 Brigade
Major (Brig.) Jafar Khan, 57 Brigade
Major (Col.) Samin Jan Babar, 22 FF
(Lt Col.) Muhammad Kamran Khan Dotani, 22 FF
Major Abdul Majid, 53 Field
Lt Naeemullah, 23 Punjab
Brig. Iqbal Shafi, 53 Field
Lt Col. (Col.) Muhammad Shafi, 23 Field
Lt Col. (Brig.) Amir Muhammad Khan, 34 Punjab
Lt Col. Matloob Hussain, 18 Punjab
Lt Syed Ataullah Shah, 27 Baloch
Capt. (Brig.) A.L.A. Zaman, 53 Field
(Col.) M. Kamaluddin, 55 Field
Capt. (Col.) Muhammad Ali Shah, 18 Punjab
Capt. Sarwar Azhar, 18 Punjab
Mr Qutubuddin Aziz
Mr Ali Yahya
Mr Ardeshir Cowasjee
Col. Inayatullah Hassan

A few individuals, from both Bangladesh and Pakistan, are not identified by name, including one senior serving officer interviewed on condition of anonymity.

The following officers did not agree to be interviewed:

Brig. (Lt Gen.) Jehanzeb Arbab, 57 Brigade
Lt Col. Basharat Sultan, 18 Punjab
Capt. (Major) Saleh Hassan Mirza, 18 Punjab
Lt Col. S. F. H. Rizvi, 32 Punjab

NOTES

INTRODUCTION: MEMORIES IN CONFLICT

1. An Ultra-Left armed revolutionary movement that rocked West Bengal in India in the late 1960s and early 1970s, named after Naxalbari in north Bengal where there was a peasant uprising. Its ideology attracted the brightest students of Calcutta. The movement was savagely suppressed by the government, introducing to the Indian political lexicon the concept of 'encounters', in which suspected militants were reported killed in apparent battles with security forces or while supposedly attempting to escape from custody.
2. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's speech at the historic rally on the Ramna race-course in Dhaka, 7 March 1971, when he was widely expected to declare independence unilaterally, but stopped just short, opting instead to continue negotiations for a political settlement till 25 March.
3. The 1965 war between India and Pakistan.
4. Terrorism and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act.
5. Many prominent Sikhs voiced their protest against the massacre of Sikhs in Delhi in 1984 and repression and human rights violations in Punjab, which experienced a long insurgency in the 1980s and early 1990s. Maj. Gen. Shah Beg Singh of the Indian army, who had been heavily involved in training and leading Mukti Bahini ('freedom force') guerrillas in Bangladesh in 1971, died fighting against the Indian army alongside the Sikh rebel leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale in the Golden Temple in Amritsar during 'Operation Bluestar' in June 1984. In October 1984 Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. Thousands of Sikhs were killed in Delhi in its aftermath. The authorities were accused of turning a blind eye and none of the persons alleged to have instigated the killings was brought to justice.
6. Sukhwant Singh (1980), p. 78.
7. Lachhman Singh (1981), p. 42.
8. Jacob (2001).
9. Then in his late eighties, General Aurora still had a striking beauty of appearance and grace of manner. A large picture of the surrender ceremony hung on a wall at his home, and among family portraits there was a vivid one of him in uniform—dancing with abandon.

10. For Sahabzada Yaqub Khan's prescient analysis of the situation in East Pakistan in March 1971, and his explanation of his decision to resign as Commander Eastern Command, see Khan (2005), 280–4, and Bose (forthcoming); also author's interview (2007).
11. After interviewing General Niazi in Lahore in 2003 I wrote a feature on him for *The Telegraph* of India, published on 17 August 2003.
12. 'Biharis' is the general term referring to the non-Bengali East Pakistanis who had migrated from northern India after the creation of Pakistan in 1947 as a Muslim homeland in South Asia.
13. Mascarenhas was a Pakistani journalist who went on a government-sponsored tour of journalists to East Pakistan in April 1971. He then fled with his family to England and wrote his exposé in the *Sunday Times* condemning the military action in East Pakistan.
14. See Sarmila Bose, 'The truth about the Jessore massacre', *The Telegraph*, 19 March 2006.
15. Sarmila Bose, 'Anatomy of Violence: Analysis of Civil War in East Pakistan in 1971', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XL, No. 41, 8–14 October 2005.

1. CALL TO ARMS: BENGALI NATIONALIST REBELLION

1. Maj. Gen. Hakeem Arshad Qureshi, *The 1971 Indo-Pak War: a Soldier's Narrative*, Oxford University Press, Pakistan, 2003, 104.
2. Archer Blood, *The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh: Memoirs of an American Diplomat*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka, 2002, 155.
3. Sisson and Rose (1990), 63.
4. Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, FRUS, vol. XI, 17–20.
5. For a concise but insightful discussion of Pakistani politics of this period in the context of the break-up of Pakistan see Sisson and Rose (1990). For a longer, excellent account see G.W. Choudhury (1974).
6. Wilcox (1973), 15.
7. Sisson and Rose (1990), 28. See also G.W. Choudhury (1974), Chapter 5.
8. Sisson and Rose (1990), 27.
9. There is a great deal of published material, both Bangladeshi and Pakistani, on the alienation of Bengalis in Pakistan over two decades from 1947. The points of conflict included the language rebellion in the early 1950s, economic disparities, low representation of Bengalis in the administration, industry and the armed forces, and cultural differences, including a perception of a superiority complex among the supposedly taller, fairer Punjabis and Pathans, with a commensurate inferiority complex among the shorter, darker East Bengalis. Some of the grievances were related to inter-province disparities and were not peculiar to East Pakistan—the province of Punjab, for instance, was more prosperous than the other Pakistani regions, some of which, like rural Sind and Balochistan, were also very disadvantaged.

10. For the 'Six Points' see Sisson and Rose (1990), 20. Some of the points would be considered 'secessionist' by any national government, as indeed they were by many Pakistanis at the time.
11. See Lt Gen. Kamal Matinuddin (1993), for a West Pakistani argument that many remedial measures were taken to redress the inherited regional inequalities. For an East Pakistani perspective on the East-West rift through the Ayub period see Rounaq Jahan (1972). G.W. Choudhury, a Bengali who served in the Pakistan government, believes that economic disparity was a serious problem, and that while General Yahya's measures to address Bengali grievances and institute what amounted to 'affirmative action' for Bengalis were the correct steps, it was already too late (Choudhury (1974)). Wilcox summarises the problems and concludes: 'It was not, therefore, economic disparity that produced the conflict between the two wings of Pakistan, but the conflict that produced the issue of disparity'. (Wilcox (1973), 17) Jahanara Imam has written about how she had to hunt around for statistics to 'prove' to her American house-guest that Bengalis were discriminated against—her tone is as though the American guest had been unreasonable in asking to see some evidence, as the discrimination was 'self-evident' to Bengalis. Imam felt that a copy of Sheikh Mujib's election poster would be enough to convince her guest (Imam (1986), 25).
12. Choudhury (1974), 10.
13. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, 'Elections in Pakistan', *Hindustan Standard*, 31 December 1970.
14. For a good account of the twists and turns of the period of negotiation, see Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of Sisson and Rose (1990). See also G.W. Choudhury (1974).
15. Sisson and Rose (1990), 122. For a strong contemporary defence of Gen. Yahya Khan's sincerity and his effort to return Pakistan to democracy see L.F. Rushbrook Williams (1971).
16. Imam (1986), 9–11. (Translated from Bengali by the author.) Rumi, the elder son of Jahanara Imam, joined the Mukti Bahini (freedom fighters), was captured and was never seen again. See Chapter 7.
17. Roy (2003), 210.
18. Choudhury (1974), 158.
19. 'During the non-violent, civil disobedience movement I chose my role in this movement as a "song director"', wrote Prof. Anisur Rahman of Dhaka University. Only in a Bengali rebellion would such a role be possible, others might say! The songs Rahman chose to teach and perform were '*bratachari*'—a regimented nationalist genre started by Gurusaday Dutt in the 1930s. After the military action started, while escaping to India on 30 March, Rahman and his fellow academic Rehman Sobhan were nearly lynched by villagers who suspected them of being non-Bengali owing to Sobhan's non-Bengali appearance and accent. Later Rahman heard that the villagers had buried alive two alleged 'collaborators' the day before on the same grounds—i.e., for not being Bengali. Rahman's native ability in the Bengali language eventually saved the day. The students who helped save them had never heard of either professor or of their intellectual efforts on behalf of East Pakistan's rights, musical or otherwise. (Rahman (2001))

20. Blood (2002), 155–6. Blood does not elaborate on the implications of the demand of the armed crowd that West Pakistani MNAs (members of parliament) be 'handed over' to them.
21. Mascarenhas (1971), 91–2.
22. Mascarenhas (1971), 99.
23. Blood (2002), 158.
24. Imam (1986), 5–6 March, 17–8.
25. Shil in Haider, ed. (1996), 5–6.
26. See for instance *Daily Telegraph* 27 March 1971.
27. Mascarenhas (1986), 14.
28. Mascarenhas (1986), 4–5.
29. See discussion in Chapter 7.
30. Majumdar in Kabir (1999).
31. Many Bangladeshi nationalists claim Subhas Chandra Bose as an inspiration. Bose formed the Indian National Army during the Second World War by winning over the political loyalty of captured Indian officers and men of the British Indian Army, in a bid to fight the enemy on the battlefield and undermine the loyalty of the remaining Indian officers and men to the British Crown. The INA was composed of men and women of all ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. Many of Bose's officers in the INA were Punjabi—Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus—reflecting the composition of the British Indian Army. Many were from areas which later became West Pakistan. Curiously, Yahya Khan and Sahabzada Yaqub Khan were Axis prisoners of war in Italy during the Second World War at the time that Bose made an appeal to Indian POWs in Europe to join his 'Indian Legion'.
32. Michael Ignatieff (1993), 15–6.

2. MILITARY INACTION: POWER WITHOUT RESPONSIBILITY

1. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976* (FRUS), vol. XI, 'South Asia Crisis, 1971', 2005, 36–7. In another phone conversation with Kissinger the next day, President Nixon says, 'The main thing to do is to keep cool and not do anything. There is nothing in it for us either way'.
2. Blood (2002), 162–7.
3. Roy (2003), 211–2.
4. Imam (1986), 22.
5. Blood (2002), 183–4.
6. Government of Pakistan, *White Paper on the Crisis in East Pakistan* (August 1971), Ch. III: 'Terror in East Pakistan', 29–43.
7. Author's interview with Maj. (Capt.) Ikram Sehgal, 2005.
8. Mascarenhas (1971), 103–4. While highly sympathetic to the Bengali rebellion, Mascarenhas was critical of Mujib and the Awami League, accusing them of failing to rise to the occasion: 'On three separate occasions between 3 and 25 March Bengali members of the armed forces approached Sheikh Mujib for guidance because they had no illusions about what was coming. Each time Mujib temporised or

turned them away with platitudes... However much the politicians may try to ride their backs, these men and the equally courageous students who fight by their sides will remain the real heroes of the struggle for Bangla Desh...' (97). In Bangladesh I heard the arguments of both sides of this continuing political divide: one side accused the politicians of being in comfortable exile while Bengali members of the police and armed forces and civilian volunteers to the Mukti Bahini did the actual fighting; the reverse argument is that Mujib led the long, hard political struggle and brought Bangladesh to the point of independence, while Bengali members of the armed forces merely jumped ship at the last moment when they felt personally threatened.

9. Author's interview with Col. (Maj.) Samin Jan Babar, 2005.
10. Author's interview with Lt Gen. (Lt) Ghulam Mustafa, 2005, 2006.
11. Qureshi (2003), 16–19.
12. Blood (2002), 160–1. Vice-Admiral Ahsan, a previous Governor, appears to have been better liked in East Pakistan.
13. Qureshi, (2003), 16–17.
14. Author's interview with Col. (Lt) Muhammad Ali Shah, 2006.
15. Author's interview with Capt. Sarwar Mehmood Azhar, 2006.
16. Mascarenhas (1971), 105. Mascarenhas was among a group of Pakistani journalists taken on a tour of East Pakistan by the military authorities in April 1971. He fled to Britain with his family and his report on the brutal suppression of the rebellion was published in the *Sunday Times* in June 1971.
17. Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism* (Vintage, 1994), 16.
18. Imam (1986), 34.
19. Blood (2002), 182.
20. The Joydevpur '*rajbari*' was the home of the '*raja*' of Bhawal—a *zamindari* estate. In 1909, the second '*kumar*' (prince) of Bhawal was said to have died while visiting Darjeeling. Twelve years later, in 1921, a '*sannyasi*' (monk) appeared in Dhaka and claimed to be the '*kumar*' who allegedly had not actually died. The widow of the second '*kumar*' denounced him as an impostor, but his sisters accepted him as their long-lost brother. So did the second '*kumar's*' mistress, a 'nautch girl', with whom he appears to have spent a lot more time than with his wife. A lengthy court-case ensued, which went all the way to the Privy Council in London. The claimant won in court at all levels, receiving the final judgment in his favour from the Privy Council in 1946. That evening, when he went to a Calcutta '*Kali*' temple to offer '*puja*', he had a stroke, and he died two days later, thus being denied the fruits of having established himself as the '*kumar*', returned from the dead. I grew up hearing about this tantalising mystery from my maternal grandfather, a lawyer and from East Bengal himself, particularly as his close friend, later Chief Justice Phanibhushan Chakrabarti, had been on the team of lawyers for the '*rani*', wife of the second '*kumar*', who had rejected the '*sannyasi*' of Bhawal as an impostor, but lost her case. As children we were pointed out the house on Lansdowne Road in Calcutta, from the balcony of which the '*rani*' had viewed the man who claimed to be her husband, as he drove down the road in a 'phaeton'. For a mes-

merising retelling and analysis of the Bhawal case, see Partha Chatterjee, *A Princely Impostor? The Strange and Universal History of the Kumar of Bhawal* (Princeton University Press, 2002).

21. Lt. Col. Masud-ul Hossain Khan in Kabir, ed. (1999), 48–9. Author's translation from Bengali.
22. Lt Col. Masud in Kabir, ed. (1999), 49.
23. Maj. Gen. K.M. Safiullah (1989), 22–7.
24. Brig. Karimullah wrote a vivid day-to-day log of what was happening in Gazipur. His account of 19 March is given later in this chapter.
25. The brigade major Jafar Khan's account of what happened on 19 March is given later in this chapter.
26. Safiullah (1989), 26.
27. Author's interview with Brig. (Maj.) Jafar Khan, 2006. Khaled Musharraf became one of the most celebrated fighters for Bangladesh's independence. He briefly seized power in Bangladesh in 1975 during the coups and counter-coups that followed Sheikh Mujib's assassination by Bangladeshi army officers, but was killed in the bloodletting that eventually brought Gen. Zia-ur Rahman to power.
28. The command of 32 Punjab was taken over by Lt Col. Muhammad Taj, a West Pakistani officer, who took a leading role in the military action that started in Dhaka on 25–6 March.
29. Brig. Karimullah, 'Log of Daily Events—POF, Ghazipur', unpublished, with permission from the author. Also author's interview with Brig. Karimullah, 2005. The brigadier is not a 'Punjabi', but 'Madrasi', as he put it with a smile—that is, of south Indian ancestry.

3. MILITARY ACTION: 'OPERATION SEARCHLIGHT' IN DHAKA

1. Blood (2002), 195.
2. Kissinger-Nixon telephone conversation, 29 March 1971, FRUS vol. XI, 35.
3. Brig. M.R. Mazumdar in Kabir, ed. (1999) (Mazumdar was the most senior Bengali officer in the Pakistan Army); Anisur Rahman (2001), 28; Raina (1981) claims there was prior liaison between Indian intelligence and the Bengali officers Col. Osmani, Maj. Khaled Musharraf, Maj. Safiullah and Kader 'Tiger' Siddiqi, and that Sheikh Mujib had been repeatedly asked to leave Dhaka but refused, allowing his colleagues to leave only at the last moment.
4. Nurul Ula in Haider, ed. (1996), 1.
5. FRUS, vol. XI, 25.
6. Author's interview with Maj. Gen. Ghulam Umar, Karachi, 2005.
7. Author's interview with Sahabzada Yaqub Khan, Karachi, 2007.
8. In a previous interview Gen. Umar had said he left East Pakistan on 26 March, the day after Yahya left. Gen. Umar is a clever man and a 'survivor' in his own way. As part of my preparation to interview him I listened to a recording (obtained from the Liberation War Museum, Dhaka) of an interview he had given to two Bangladeshis some years before, in which he had given lengthy answers and ranged widely,

leaving the Bangladeshis completely at sea. I interrupted his flow frequently with specific questions, which was more productive, but did not sway Gen. Umar from minimizing his role in 'Operation Searchlight'. He said he was retired 'on the news' by Bhutto at the end of the war and his pension was stopped, but it was restored when General Zia took power. Others, like Mitha or Niazi, who also had their pensions cancelled, were not as fortunate. In later years Umar re-invented himself as a participant in Track II diplomacy with India. Unlike many others, Umar did not indulge in easy potshots at the deposed General Yahya, maintaining that Yahya had been a 'very good professional soldier' and that contrary to others' allegations his 'personal habits' did not affect his policy judgment.

9. Qureshi (2003), 23–4.
10. Mitha (2003), ch. 21.
11. Mazumdar, in Kabir, ed. (1999), 33–4.
12. *Prabasi* refers to Bengalis living outside Bengal, whether elsewhere in India or anywhere in the world. 'Chatterjee' is a Hindu, Brahmin surname; this family, however, was Christian.
13. Mitha (2003), ch. 17. The early chapters of General Mitha's book are a vivid social history of the times. I have also benefited greatly from my conversations about East Pakistan and 1971 with Indu Mitha and the Mitha family.
14. Author's interview with Brig. (Lt Col.) Muhammad Taj, 2005.
15. Mitha (2003), 336.
16. Sisson and Rose (1990), 157–60.
17. From a partial recording of radio communications among Pakistan army officers during the operation of the night of 25–26 March (Radio 25–26 March 1971). A copy of the recording was provided to me by the Liberation War Museum, Dhaka. A more detailed treatment of the content of the recording is given later in this chapter.
18. Nurul Ula in Haider, ed. (1996), 2–3.
19. FRUS vol. XI, 34.
20. Blood (2002), 207.
21. Simon Dring, *The Sunday Telegraph*, 16 April 1971, in Government of Bangladesh (1984), vol. 14, 345–7.
22. Shil, in Haider, ed. (1996), 5–6. Author's translation from Bengali.
23. Islam, in Haider, ed. (1996), 18–19. Author's translation from Bengali.
24. Mitha (2003), 335.
25. Basanti Guhathakurta (1991, 2000), 1–5 and in Haider, ed. (2002), 166–74.
26. Author's interview with Capt. Sarwar, 2006.
27. The division of duties among the different units is put together from my interviews with officers of 18 Punjab, 32 Punjab and 57 Brigade HQ who took part in the action.
28. Author's interview with Brig. (Maj.) Jafar Khan, 2006.
29. Shah was charged with corruption in the Hamoodur Rahman Commission report, and, according to other officers, allegedly fled the country to avoid arrest.
30. As Col. Shah pointed out, a company was supposed to be commanded by a Major, but the army was so short of officers that Captains and even Lieutenants ended

up with responsibilities beyond their rank or experience. There was a shortage of troops as well and units were constantly broken up on an ad hoc basis to deal with one task or the other throughout the year.

31. Author's interview with Col. (Lt) Muhammad Ali Shah, 2006.
32. It is not clear whether these were resisters at barricades or uninvolved people who happened to be out on the road.
33. Author's interview with Rabindra Mohan Das, 2005.
34. Guhathakurta (1991, 2000), 6.
35. Nurul Ula in Haider, ed. (1996), 1.
36. Shil in Haider, ed. (1996), 6–8. Lt Sadat Farooq of the Pakistan Army, who was killed in action later in the year, spoke to some of his colleagues about searching the student halls that night, going from room to room in pitch dark, not knowing what to expect, often shooting blindly.
37. The Liberation War Museum, Dhaka has a tape recording of some of the radio communications among officers during the military action in Dhaka on the night of 25–26 March. The tape recording—a fascinating primary source—is credited to M.M. Hussain, Atomic Energy Centre, Dhaka, who is said to have made the recording at B-174 Khilgaon Chowdhury Para, Dhaka, from around 1.30 a.m. to 9 a.m. on 26 March. I am grateful to the Liberation War Museum for giving me a copy of this recording for my research. Through my interviews with Pakistan army officers I have verified the authenticity of the tape and established the probable identity of some of the speakers, which are given in parentheses.
38. Author's interviews with Brig. (Lt Col.) Taj, 2005 and Brig. (Maj.) Jafar Khan, 2006.
39. Jahanara Imam (1986), 40–1.
40. Akhtar Imam (1998, 2002) and conversation with the author, 2006.
41. Begum Akhtar Imam, who studied at Bethune College, Calcutta, was awarded the Gangamani Devi gold medal of Calcutta University for ranking first among women Honours students in Philosophy in 1937. She was Provost of Rokeya Hall at Dhaka University from 1956. Curiously, Akhtar Imam mentions that on 27 March, when curfew was lifted, her wrecked house was invaded again, this time by a number of aggressive Bengalis, demanding to know how many hundreds of women students had been 'tortured and killed'. As soon as the war was over on 16 December 1971 she was questioned by an Indian Army 'Major' about how many girl-students had been in Rokeya Hall on 25–26 March and later. After speaking to her and the house tutors and examining the hall records they presented, the Indian officer remarked that what he had been told earlier now appeared to be completely false (Imam (1998), 153–5). Mrs Imam was sent on leave in independent Bangladesh, labelled a 'collaborator', and was never allowed to return to her post of Provost.
42. Basanti Guhathakurta describes hearing shooting at the Shahid Minar, with a soldier chasing some rebels across the street into their pond area. Guhathakurta (2000), 11–13.
43. Nurul Ula in Haider, ed. (1996), 2. Translated from Bengali by the author.
44. FRUS, vol. XI, 42.

45. I have put together what happened in Building 34 from my conversations and site visit with Professor Meghna Guhathakurta, daughter of Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta and herself now a faculty member at Dhaka University, and Mrs Basanti Guhathakurta's book, supplemented by Prof. Anisur Rahman's book, Jahanara Imam's reference to meeting the Hai family in hospital on 27 March, Shil and Fazl's accounts of carrying corpses, the tapes of the radio communications among army commanders, and interviews with several officers who took part in the military action in Dhaka that night. I am grateful to Prof. Meghna Guhathakurta for accompanying me to the university—to Jagannath Hall and its field, Building 34 where she lived with her family—and for helping me identify what happened where, including the spot where her father was shot.
46. This conversation is presented exactly as written in Basanti Guhathakurta (1991, 2000), 6–7. Translated from the Bengali by the author. Some of the Urdu may be ungrammatical, but it is presented the way Basanti Guhathakurta wrote it.
47. After talking to officers of 18 Punjab I have established the identity of the Battalion Havildar Major. He would normally accompany the Commanding Officer.
48. Rahman (2001), Imam (1986), 44–5.
49. Kamal Hossain is an eminent lawyer and former Foreign Minister of Bangladesh. Brig. Taj said the Captain he had sent to arrest Kamal Hossain complained that Mrs Hossain (who is from West Pakistan) had slapped him. In Bangladesh the story is the reverse—the officer is accused of slapping Hossain's niece (Rahman (2001), 37). Maj. Gen. Mitha has written that Kamal Hossain later sent him a message through his brother-in-law, asking to turn himself in, and General Mitha collected him from the home of a relative (Mitha, 344).
50. Abdullah Khaled, in Haider, ed. (1996), 26–30; Kohinoor Hossain, in Haider, ed. (1991, vol. IV), 1–19.
51. Basanti Guhathakurta writes that Dr Murtaza, who lived next to Iqbal Hall, described to her how he had gone out to assist two injured students on 26 March morning and had also been pressed into corpse-carrying by the military. He had counted twenty-five to thirty bodies at the 'British Council' and was about to be lined up and shot also, when a truck appeared and the soldiers got on it and left. In a very similar account to Shil's, another person, Abul Fazl, also claimed to have been in Jagannath Hall that night, and to have survived and carried corpses. He worked for the postal service, but had been in Jagannath Hall since 1 March. They had explosives in their room to make bombs. During the attack he also claims to have hidden in a toilet, and later mingled with the gardeners and sweepers to try to avoid detection. He too said the soldiers separated Biharis from Bengalis, but shot everyone. Fazl says he carried the corpses of Prof. Maniruzzaman and two of his relatives, and also his room-mate Shishutosh Datta's. He too claims he lay down among the corpses just prior to their group being shot. From his description he would have been in the same place as Shil. He and another boy—also not a student—escaped. Fazl claims to have seen from a building opposite bulldozers levelling fifty to sixty bodies and limbs sticking out of the earth. His account is written by another, based on an interview (Kabir, ed. (1999), 94–9).

52. 'Dispatches', War Crimes File, 1994. I contacted Channel 4 but they were unable to trace the original footage.
53. Akhtar Imam (2002), 266–7.
54. Three officers involved in this event all declined to talk to me. Therefore, I do not have confirmation from them of their own specific actions.
55. Meghna Guhathakurta in the Bengali documentary film *Shei raater kotha boltey eshechhi.*
56. There is a reference in the taped radio communications to the police lines being on fire.
57. He also saw dozens of corpses in the New Market area—just poor people, he said, who may have been on the road or the pavements. Badrul Alam, a Bangladeshi air force pilot decorated for his role in the liberation war, also saw bodies of ordinary people in the New Market area on 27 March. (Author's conversations with Dr Kalam and Mr Alam.)
58. Author's interview with Brig. (Lt Col.) Taj. Brig. A.R. Siddiqi was the chief of the Inter-Services Public Relations. See also Siddiqi (2005). Many Pakistan army officers who served in East Pakistan told me that in their view it was a grave error to throw out the foreign media.
59. Telephone conversation between Rogers and Kissinger, 6 April 1971 (FRUS vol. XI, 47–48).
60. Telephone conversation between Kissinger and Nixon, 30 March 1971 (FRUS vol. XI, 37).
61. Senior Review Group meeting, White House Situation Room, 6 March 1971 (FRUS, vol. XI, 8–16).
62. Blood (2002), 286.
63. Kissinger, *White House Years*, cited in FRUS vol. XI, 48.
64. Author's interview with Lt. Gen. A.A.K. Niazi, 2003. See also Niazi (1998, 2002).
65. Nazrul Islam in Haider ed., (1996), 18–25. Translated from Bengali by the author. Islam and his friend survived, Shahnawaz was already dead.

4. UNCIVIL WAR: MOBS, MUTINIES AND MADNESS

1. FRUS, vol. XI, 45–8.
2. Author's interview with (then) Lt Syed Ataullah Shah, 2006. A report in *Time* by Dan Coggins on 19 April mentioned that 'Naseem Waquer', 'Assistant' DC (District Commissioner) of Kushtia, was killed and his body dragged through the streets. (Naseem Waqar Mian was Additional DC, as confirmed by his brother Irfan Ahmad Waqar.)
3. FRUS, vol. XI, 47, fn 7.
4. FRUS, vol. XI, 47–8.
5. Author's interview with Amiya Kumar Sur, 2004 and 2005. During these interviews at Shankharipara, other survivors (such as Narayan Nandy) would come by too, nod in agreement, or add their experience.
6. 18 Punjab, the same regiment that carried out the military action in Dhaka University, was responsible for attacking Shankharipara. The very same company—

under Capt. Saleh Hassan Mirza—that had been at the student halls on the night of 25–26 March was apparently in Shankharipara the next day. Lt Col. Basharat Sultan, CO of 18 Punjab, and Capt. Saleh Hassan Mirza declined to talk to me. As to why Shankharipara would be a target at all, another officer who had been based in Dhaka told me that they had heard stories that rich Hindu Marwaris bankrolled the Awami League and lived in Shankharipatti, and that Muslims were not allowed to pass down that lane unless barefoot. So greed, hate and communalism are possible reasons, but none form the basis for legitimate military targets.

7. Mascarenhas (1971), 114. 'Para' and 'patti' denote 'neighbourhood'.
8. Author's interview with Amar Sur, 2004 and 2005. One of his surviving brothers and other survivors joined the conversation from time to time. While others sometimes added their bit, the brother never spoke.
9. The studio was 'A. K. Studio' in Sovabazar in Calcutta, according to Amar Sur. The photographer who took this photo would have taken other photos too—which would be a valuable resource if found.
10. One Bengali newspaper correctly identified the victims in the photo but wrongly stated that the bodies had been thrown out on the street. A 'documents' publication by the Liberation War Museum in Dhaka wrongly captions the photo as 'Innocent women were raped and then killed along with their children by the barbarous Pakistan Army'.
11. 'da' added to a name denotes 'elder brother' and applies to non-relatives too.
12. See the section on Jinjira below.
13. From the recording of communications among army units taking part in the military action in Dhaka, 25–26 March 1971. Probable names of speakers in parentheses.
14. Author's interview with Col. (Lt) Muhammad Ali Shah, 2006.
15. Brig. Karimullah, 'Log of Daily Events—POF, Ghazipur' (unpublished) with the author's permission and author's interview with Brig. Karimullah, 2005.
16. Safiullah (1989), 27–8.
17. Brig. Majumdar in Kabir, ed. (1999), 33–47.
18. Lt Col. Masud-ul Hossain Khan in Kabir, ed. (1999), 48–59.
19. Maj. Gen. Safiullah in Haider, ed. (1996), 226–7. Author's translation from Bengali.
20. Safiullah (1989), 27–39.
21. Brig. Karimullah, 'Log of Daily Events—POF, Ghazipur' (unpublished).
22. Safiullah (1989), 39.
23. Author's interview with Rustam Ali Sikdar, 2004.
24. Author's interview with Abdur Rab Sardar, 2004.
25. Sardar thought the General Manager of Crescent Jute Mill was an Englishman called Wallace. Another Crescent Jute Mill employee, S.M. Raqib Ali, thought the GM was Meher Ali, and his deputy was Mr Mecklai—both 'from Bombay', by which it is meant that they were Ismailis. All the Ismaili managers were described by the Bengalis as good people, fair to both Bengalis and Biharis.

26. Author's interview with Muhammad Shafi, Sabek, Pervez Alam Khan and many others, 2004.
27. The Bengali mill workers I interviewed accused the Biharis of setting up a gallows to kill Bengalis, later in the year.
28. Author's interview with Col. (Maj.) Samin Jan Babar, 2005.
29. Government of Pakistan, *White Paper* (1971), 64–9.
30. Author's conversations with Muhammad Abdul Haq and Sheikh Sultan Ahmed, 2004. Ahmed's version cannot be relied upon in its details without other corroborating material. However, it confirmed that Bengali elements at the 'cantonment' had rebelled and that many West Pakistanis had been killed there. Among Ahmed's many stories was the claim that in the following days he saved the life of a 'Punjabi' man, who in turn saved Ahmed's life later. He named the 'Punjabi' as Nazir Ahmad, nephew of one Ghulam Rasool, a businessman who had returned with his family to West Pakistan when the troubles started, leaving his nephew behind to mind the business. A Bengali member of the 'Peace Committee' was alleged to have eventually acquired their property.
31. Brig. (Capt.) Shaukat Qadir, manuscript (unpublished), 7.
32. Author's interview with the officer, 2005.
33. Author's interview with Maj. Anis Ahmad, 2005. See also section on Joydevpur above.
34. Brig. (Capt.) Shaukat Qadir, manuscript (unpublished), 7, and author's interview, 2005.
35. Author's interview with Capt. Sarwar, 2006.
36. Author's interview with Brig. Iqbal Shafi, 2006.
37. Mitha (2003), 336–8.
38. Roy (2003), 215.
39. Chowdhury in Haider, ed. (1996) and author's interview with Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury, 2005. In an indication of the depths of hatred to which the former comrades-in-arms had descended, Chowdhury has alleged that he was beaten even when immobile on a hospital bed, and described the Pakistan Army as '*borbor*', '*poshu-sulabh*', '*rakta-unmad*' (barbaric, animal-like, blood-mad). However, he was put through a lengthy investigation, charge-sheeted in September, and was due to be tried in December when full-scale war broke out with India. He joined the diplomatic service of independent Bangladesh.
40. Gen. Mitha had also appointed a Bengali Major as his Personal Staff Officer (PSO) during these operations, to demonstrate that the conflict was not based on ethnicity. In contrast, he wrote that during a visit to the military hospital at Chittagong, 'As I was walking down the ward, a Bengali officer who was wounded and under guard called out to me. I stopped and went to him, and he said that all he wanted to tell me was that he and his men had stripped women from West Pakistan, and after raping them, had made them dance in the nude; having done this, he was quite happy to die. I made no reply and walked on...' (Mitha (2003), 341). During my research three other Pakistani officers independently mentioned exactly the same experience at the Dhaka military hospital, except that they knew

the wounded Bengali officer and identified him by name. He survived and holds high public office in independent Bangladesh.

41. Author's interview with Col. (Maj.) Anis Ahmad, 2005.
42. Author's interview with Lt Gen. (Capt.) Ali Kuli Khan Khattak, 2005.
43. See for instance, *Washington Post* 12 May 1971, *New York Times* 11 May 1971 and Associated Press reports.
44. Roy (2003), 214–21. In another example of the prevailing lawlessness, the DC and SDO (civil servants) of his area asked a Pathan contractor Nuruzzaman Khan to surrender his firearms, promising him protection, but when he did so, Bengali EPR soldiers killed him. The Bihari Reserve Inspector of Police and his family were killed too. The army did not operate as a coordinated body either. For example, one unit asked the Bengali SP (Superintendent of Police) of Chittagong to help get the administration going again, but an officer from another unit picked him up and he was never seen again.
45. Author's interview with Joynal Abedin Dewan, 2004.
46. Siddiqi (1997), vol. 1.
47. See section on Joydevpur above.
48. Siddiqi (1997), vol. 1, 18–35.
49. Author's interview with Lt Ataullah Shah, 2006.
50. The reporter actually seems to have been Martin Woollacott of the *Guardian*, whose report 'Death and victory in Bangladesh' was published on 7 April 1971. A BBC report by Mark Tully on 7 April refers to Woollacott's article. While researching foreign press reports from 1971 I found a photograph published in the *Daily Telegraph* on 7 April 1971 whose caption reads: 'A lieutenant of the West Pakistan Army, suffering from head wounds, being interviewed by a reporter after he had been captured with sixteen other men by Bangla Desh (Free Bengal) Liberation Forces near Jessore'. It does not say how the lieutenant got his head wounds. A report from Chuadanga is on the same page. Another report, by David Loshak from Calcutta is captioned 'Britons tell of army's massacre in Chittagong', but the British evacuees are quoted as saying that both sides were killing each other and almost all of the report is about brutalities committed by the Awami League and other Bengalis against ordinary non-Bengalis.
51. Author's interviews with Maj. Gen. Imamuz Zaman, 2004; Brig. A. L A. Zaman and Col. Kamal Ud Din, 2006; Brig. Iqbal Shafi, 2006. See also section on Chittagong above. To avoid confusion the two cousins are referred to by their ranks in 1971—as 'Capt. Zaman' and 'Lt. Imam'.
52. Maj. Gen. Imamuz Zaman (2001, 2002); in Haider, ed. (1996); *New York Times*, 17 April 1971.
53. Brig. Iqbal Shafi was born and raised in Aligarh, where his father was professor of economics. Genial and somewhat professorial himself when I met him, Brig. Shafi said he loved being in East Pakistan and had thrice happily accepted postings there. After completing his tasks in Chittagong in March-April 1971, Brig. Shafi opted to be located in Feni. Another brigadier took over in Comilla.
54. Author's interview with Maj. Abdul Majid, 2005. He remembered Capt. Zaman as a loyal Bengali officer of the Pakistan army who had fought in the war to the end.

55. See A.K.M. Fazlul Haq Khan on his brother Shamsul Haq Khan, the DC of Comilla, in Haider ed. (1991), vol. IV. He states that the DC, along with the SP and others, had organised a plan of resistance against the government from early March, stopped rations to the army and ordered the SP not to give the keys to the arms store to the brigade commander. When Gen. Mitha was looking for the 'missing' 53HQ brigade on 26 March, he went to Comilla cantonment and found 'an Artillery Lt. Col. or Major, who was in a highly excited and nervous state.... He claimed that a huge crowd had gathered in Comilla to attack the cantonment. I then told him that he was flapping...' (Mitha (2003), 336). The Hamoodur Rehman Commission report refers to the alleged massacre of 17 Bengali officers and 915 men on 27–28 March on the orders of Lt Col. Yaqub Malik. Lt Col. Malik gave evidence to the commission and denied the allegations (HRC report, 510, 512).
56. Safiullah (1989), 66–74.
57. Sen, *Identity and Violence: the Illusion of Destiny* (Allen Lane, 2006), 171–2.

5. VILLAGE OF WIDOWS: 'SECURING' THE COUNTRYSIDE

1. Author's interview with Raihan Ali, 2004.
2. Three thousand is a very high estimate, even after counting people from neighbouring areas and outsiders like the rebel police. This is also the recollection of someone who was a child then. However, judging on the basis of my visit to the site, given the topography of the river bank, several hundred people could have been there, especially in the dry season.
3. Author's interview with Mahmooda Begum, 2004.
4. A reference to people from the West Pakistani province of Balochistan. An analysis of the 'Beluchis' referred to by Bengalis in East Pakistan is in Chapter 9.
5. Author's interview with Uyajaan, 2004.
6. Author's interview with Muhammad Abdus Sattar, 2004.
7. The founder of Pakistan was Muhammad Ali Jinnah.
8. *Chor*: transient areas of land created by silt deposits.
9. One Pakistan Army officer told me that this might be Major Saifullah Khan, a Pathan officer of 12 Punjab regiment, who had served in the area. Struck by this intriguing case of a Pakistan Army officer praised by a Bengali villager who had survived being shot and set alight by another officer, I tried to locate Major Saifullah and was told he had passed away.
10. Author's interview with Muhammad Zinnatul Alam, 2004.
11. The officers were apparently mutilated and killed. Alam did not say what happened to the wife.
12. While Raihan Ali and his father Muhammad Abdus Sattar said the army units were coming from Rajshahi, Alam is clear that these were units coming from Dhaka towards Rajshahi.
13. Alam appears to suffer a deep sense of guilt about stopping his younger brother and his brother-in-law from holding on to the logs and swimming across, as both

men were killed in the subsequent shooting,.while he was spared. He has spent his life looking after his widowed sister and her family, whom I also met at his home.

14. In Bengali the 'Z' sound does not exist, it is pronounced as 'J'. So 'Zinnatul' is pronounced 'Jinnatul'.
15. From the province of Sind in West Pakistan.
16. A carriage, tandem.
17. Author's interview with Brig. (Lt Col.) Muhammad Taj, 2005. Lt Gen. (Brig.) Jehanzeb Arbab declined repeated requests for an interview.
18. Mitha (2003), 343–4.
19. Lt Col. (later apparently Maj. Gen.) Rizvi declined to be interviewed.
20. Nazim Mahmud, a staff member of Rajshahi University, in a totally hostile depiction of the Vice-Chancellor Sajjad Hossain, has written that he returned to campus on 21 April and was told to arrange the 'birth anniversary' celebration of the poet Iqbal. However, Iqbal's birth anniversary is on 9 November; his death anniversary is on 21 April. Mahmud has written that four army officers were present at the evening's event. (Mahmud, in Haider, ed. (1996), 89–92).
21. This officer's family is from Peshawar, North West Frontier Province. It may be recalled that Muhammad Abdus Sattar, the Bengali villager who survived the shooting at Thanapara, stated that a second army unit—a 'Pathan' one—had gone to the river bank near 'Muktarpur Cadet College', but had not killed anyone there. None of the officers of 18 Punjab and 32 Punjab who spoke to me could recognise the name 'Muktarpur Cadet College', though they all knew the Sarda police academy. Some of them did recognise the name 'Rajshahi Cadet College'.
22. D Company of this regiment had been involved in the action in Dhaka University on 25–26 March 1971.
23. See Chapter 9 for an analysis of the 'ethnicisation' of enemy and ally by the Bengali nationalists of East Pakistan.
24. One officer of 18 Punjab told me that when he finally returned home his own father demanded to know the truth about what the regiment had been doing in East Pakistan. Of the Pakistan army officers who spoke to me, all except one said that they had never experienced an incident in which unarmed people were rounded up and killed. Curiously, the then brigade commander of 57 Brigade, Jehanzeb Arbab, and the commanding officers of its constituent units 32 Punjab and 18 Punjab—Lt Col. Taj and Lt Col. Basharat—were all sent back to West Pakistan during 1971. According to the Hamoodur Rahman Commission, along with Maj. Madad Hussain Shah of 18 Punjab, Lt Col. Muzaffar Ali Khan Zahid, then commanding officer of 31 Field regiment and Lt Col. Tufail, then commanding officer of 55 Field regiment, they were accused of 'looting'. (HRC Report, 505–6). No trial or resolution of this accusation is mentioned.
25. FRUS, vol. XI, 10–1.
26. FRUS, vol. XI, 35–6.

6. HOUNDING OF HINDUS: THE POLITICS OF MINORITY PERSECUTION

1. Blood (2002), 216.
2. Author's interview with Nitai Gayen, 2004.
3. Author's interviews with survivors and eye-witnesses of the Chuknagar killings, at Chuknagar and villages in Khulna district, 2004–5.
4. This aim is shared by a team from Dhaka University, which has published a book in Bengali on the Chuknagar massacre containing interviews with 90 persons selected out of a total of 200 interviewed during a 'Muktijuddha camp' in 2000. The book claims that a small group of soldiers, perhaps just a platoon (which might be about 30 people), lightly armed with their personal weapons only, killed 10,000 people at Chuknagar—a claim made without regard to whether it makes any sense or can be matched with the reality on the ground (Mamoon, ed. (2002)).
5. An auxiliary force formed later in the year by the army comprising local East Pakistanis, both Bengali and Bihari.
6. 'Biharis' were the non-Bengali East Pakistanis—Muslims who had migrated to East Pakistan from northern India.
7. Not all of the Muslim residents of Chuknagar were cynical exploiters of the distress of the Hindu refugees or apathetic to their suffering. The actions of two Muslim women of Chuknagar stand out in particular. One sat on the *madur* (mat) that was wrapped around Nitai Gayen as he hid from the soldiers. The other rescued the injured Shailen Joardar from the river bank and nursed him back to health in her own home.'
8. Blood (2002), 217.
9. Blood (2002), 216–7.

7. HIT AND RUN: SABOTAGE AND RETRIBUTION

1. Sasthi Brata, 'Big brother goes to war', *The Guardian*, 18 September 1971.
2. Singh (1981), 60.
3. Sisson and Rose (1990), 212.
4. 'A flickering cause: East Pakistanis pledge to fight to the death but mostly they don't', Peter Kann, *Wall Street Journal*, 21 April 1971.
5. *New York Times*, 10 May 1971.
6. *Washington Post*, 13 May 1971.
7. 'An urge for self-destruction', Harvey Stockwin, *Financial Times*, 21 May 1971.
8. Author's interview with Abul Barq Alvi, 2005. See also Alvi in Haider, ed. (1996), 163–6 and Alvi in Kabir, ed. (1999), 87–93.
9. Sara Ara Mahmood in Haider, ed., *Smriti 1971*, vol. 1, 158–60.
10. All the stories of those who were arrested in Dhaka on suspicion of rebel activities state that they were taken to the Martial Law Court and that the army took into custody all the adult men from the places they raided. Those later found to be uninvolved—usually after the initial rounds of thrashing—were sent home. Many of those identified as active militants were never seen again and are presumed to have been executed.

11. Masood Sadek 'Chullu', Linu Billah, one of Altaf Mahmood's relatives, and Naser Bakhtiar Ahmad, one of Mahmood's neighbours, have recorded very similar accounts of their experience at the interrogation centre. The same fellow prisoners are mentioned—the rebels Jewel, Rumi, Rumi's father Sharif Imam and his younger brother Jami, Bodi-ul Alam (who tried to escape), Hafiz of Dhaka television, and so on. See Kabir, ed. (1999). See also Jahanara Imam (1986).
12. For more on the Bengalis' perception of the humanity of the 'Beluch', see Chapter 9.
13. Several other people detained also mention the procedure of being taken at night to be registered at Ramna police station.
14. Imam (1986). Some Bangladeshis later commented that while beautifully written, the book is not necessarily accurate in all its details.
15. It would appear therefore that the kindly older soldier mentioned by Alvi, who gave them bread, was doing so after Jahanara Imam's request on the phone. Alvi speculated that he was 'Beluchi', but Mrs Imam has written that he was a Bihari. So the same man seems to have been named by different Bengalis as the cruellest and the kindest, a Bihari and a Beluchi.
16. Leonard Gordon, *Bengal: the Nationalist Movement 1876–1940*, Manohar, 1979, 156.
17. Singhania in Haider, ed. (1996), 131–2.
18. Author's interview with Col. Muhammad Shafi, 2005.
19. Muhammad Safikul Alam Choudhury in Haider, ed. (1996), 133–7.
20. Government of Bangladesh, *History of Bangladesh War of Independence*, Documents, Vol. VIII, 511–12. These volumes are a mixture of official documents and unofficial material like selected newspaper items. The publishers appear to have made no attempt to verify non-official material such as this one.
21. Author's interview with Brig. (Lt Col.) Amir Muhammad Khan, 2006.
22. Author's interview with Muhammad Ali Akbar, Joynal Abedin and conversations with many other villagers, Boroitola, 2004. The memorial was an indeterminate piece of modern sculpture bearing a plaque with the line of the poetry '*dnarao pothikbor*' ('traveller, wait a while'). When we arrived a man was sleeping peacefully in its shade.
23. Joynal Abedin's young daughter ran home and brought back a book on 'martyrs' of Kishoreganj in 1971, published locally, which lists 154 names of people of the area who died that year. Initially it seemed exactly the sort of documentation that Bangladesh badly needs. However, one young man spoke up from the crowd to say that the book has many errors, and that some people listed in it were still alive! The others agreed that there are such mistakes in the book. (On the other hand, the list may have omitted genuine victims of the war.) The young man who said living people were included in the list of the dead later disclosed that Moulana Hafez, mentioned earlier—who had managed to take his own villagers away—was his grandfather. He defended his grandfather, and offered another theory: he said the Razakar who came and spoke to the military was talking about his own brother being ill or hurt, but as he could not speak Urdu very well, the military seemed to have mistakenly thought that one of their own men had been killed in

the village. That was why they went mad with rage and shot everyone. This introduced the intriguing possibility that dozens of civilians were lined up and shot because the army and the people did not speak each other's language, literally.
24. There are several Bengali eye-witness accounts of another unexplained mass killing by the army at the National Jute Mill at Ghorasal, near Narsingdi, on 1 December 1971. See for instance Haider, ed., *Smriti 1971* series.
25. Author's interview with S.M. Raqib Ali, 2004.
26. Interestingly, Raqib Ali said, 'First there was Farman Ali, next was A.K. Niazi', by way of explanation, in a manner that could refer either to the fact that General Niazi had come to East Pakistan later, or to the impression among Bengalis that Farman Ali was the more powerful.
27. See also Hayat (1998) for an account of the battle at Khulna by the Pakistani brigade commander.
28. Author's interview with Kabir Mia, 2004.
29. Singh (1980), 30–7.
30. Singh (1981), 50–64.
31. Sisson and Rose (1990), 212.
32. Jacob (2001), 90–4.
33. Singh (1981), 288.
34. Sasthi Brata, 'Big brother goes to war', *The Guardian*, 18 September 1971. This is a uniquely fascinating account, as the writer was able to speak to the Bengalis in their own language and travel undetected inside East Pakistan, but had none of the constraints of journalists working in Indian media. *The Guardian* trailed his report with the comment: 'If he had sent this report from India he would have been arrested'.

8. FRATRICIDE: DEATH SQUADS AT WAR'S END

1. Author's interview with Shyamoli Nasreen Choudhury, in the presence of her daughter Farzana Choudhury Neepa and her brother-in-law and later second husband Hafiz Choudhury. See also Choudhury in Haider, ed. (1993), 194–9 and Choudhury in Haider, ed. (1996), 233–7.
2. Niazi (1998), 78–9.
3. Wrap-around garment worn by East Bengali men.
4. The *Shaheed buddhijeebi koshgrantha*, edited by Rashid Haider (Bangla Academy, 1994), lists 24 *buddhijeebi*—professionals and intellectuals—who were picked up by the Al-Badr in the second week of December and ended up dead or 'disappeared'. They were: A.N.M. Ghulam Mustafa, journalist (12 Dec.); Anwar Pasha, professor (14 Dec.); Abdur Rauf Sardar, economist (8 Dec.); Aleem Choudhury, doctor (15 Dec.); Abul Kalam Azad, professor (15 Dec.); Abul Khair, professor (10 Dec.); A.K.M. Siddiq, lawyer (14 Dec.); M.A.M. Faizul Mahi, professor (14 Dec.); Ghiyasuddin Ahmad, professor (14 Dec.); Nizamuddin Ahmad, journalist (12 Dec.); Muhammad Akhtar, writer (14 Dec.); Munir Choudhury, professor (14 Dec.); Muhammad Aminuddin, scientist (14 Dec.); Mofazzal Haider Choudhury, professor (14 Dec.); Fazle Rabbi, cardiologist (15 Dec.); Muhammad Murtaza,

doctor (14 Dec.); Rashidul Hasan, professor (14 Dec.); Shahidullah Kaiser, journalist (14 Dec.); Santosh Bhattacharyya, professor (14 Dec.); Sirajul Haq Khan, professor (14 Dec.); Sirajuddin Hossain, journalist (10 Dec.); Syed Najmul Haq, journalist (11 Dec.); Selina Parveen, writer (14 Dec.); Rafiqul Haider Choudhury, writer (13 Dec.).

5. HRC report, 511–12.
6. Family members of other victims have written recollections similar to Mrs Shyamoli Nasreen Choudhury's—see the *Smriti '71* series edited by Rashid Haider, vol. 1–13. Some have even identified a Bengali man as one of the young men picking up the targets. He was shown living openly in the UK in a 'Dispatches' programme called 'War Crimes Files' on Channel 4 in 1994. Of the reminiscences, only those of Jahanara Rabbi, wife of Dr Fazle Rabbi, made a connection with the Pakistan army—she claims that she spoke to a Colonel (named by many as the head of the Martial Law courts' interrogation centre) on 15 December and that he admitted picking up Dr Rabbi, Dr Choudhury and twenty professors of the university. She claimed she spoke again to the same officer on the morning of 16 December, and he said he did not know what had happened to the prisoners (Jahanara Rabbi in Haider ed., *Smriti* 1971, vol. 2 (1989)). I tried to find Mrs Rabbi, but was told that she was dead. None of the other families mention any Pakistani officer.
7. Dilawar Hossain's reminiscences published in *Dainik Bangla*, 21 December 1971, reproduced in *Ekattorer ghatok-dalalera ke kothay* (*Muktijuddha Chetona Bikash Kendro*, 1989), courtesy Liberation War Museum, Dhaka. Dilawar Hossain is also shown in the 'Dispatches' programme mentioned above.
8. I requested a meeting with Maulana Mannan to obtain his side of the story, but he had been struck down in a paralytic stroke and had lost his power of speech. He died some months later.
9. Haider, ed., *Shahid buddhijeebi koshgrantha* (Bangla Academy, 1985, 1994) lists 24 professionals picked up and killed in December at Rayerbazar or other unknown locations. If Dilawar Hossain saw 130–140 people there, it is unclear who the others were.
10. Jahanara Rabbi in Haider, ed., *Smriti 1971* (1989), vol. 2, 26.
11. As I tried to find the alleged sole survivor of the Rayerbazar killings, Dilawar Hossain, I was introduced to a young man who had helped the 'Dispatches' team locate Mr Hossain earlier. The young man's own father had also 'disappeared' in the last days of the war and his body had never been found. In the event, he was not able to find Hossain on that occasion. However, he gave a group of us an animated account of what Dilawar Hossain had apparently said. While doing so he cited the number of captives seen by Hossain at Rayerbazar as '800–900' and said that Hossain had made good his escape while the killers were busy gang-raping a woman prisoner. Shortly thereafter I read the published account by Dilawar Hossain cited above. It gave the estimated number of captives at Rayerbazar as 130–140, a far more plausible figure, and stated that Hossain escaped while the prisoners in front of him were being killed. As the son of a victim of the December killings, the young man has the profound sympathy of all right-think-

ing people, but that does not give him the license to inflate figures and distort events. What actually happened was ghastly enough, and all irresponsible embellishments obstruct the process of documentation and damage the credibility of Bangladeshi commentators.

12. As shown in various instances in this book, torture of opponents was practiced by all sides in the conflict, and brutalisation and killings were committed by those fighting in the name of freedom and democracy. One disturbing and as yet unexplored question of the 1971 war is the impact of the brutalisation on children caught up in the conflict. Children were not only victims and witnesses to brutality, they were drawn in as active participants too—teenaged boys in particular were in effect 'child warriors' for 'liberation'. One former Muktijoddha told me that among them there was a young boy of about middle-school age who specialised in torturing West Pakistani captives by cutting them all over their bodies with a blade and applying salt and chilli paste to the wounds. It is unclear what happened to such children of war in independent Bangladesh and what the impact was on society of the brutalisation of young minds.
13. 'Indian Army arrests 'Tiger of Tangail' after Dacca bayonetings', *The Times*, 21 December 1971.
14. Siddiqi (1985, 1997), vol. 2, 299–305.
15. Husain (1995), Chapter 1.
16. See also Panna Kaiser on Shahidullah Kaiser in Haider, ed., *Smriti 1971*, vol. 1 (1988), 89–93, and Zakaria Habib on Zahir Raihan in vol. 2, 45–51.
17. Author's interviews with Bengali jute mill workers and Bihari residents, Khulna, 2004. See also Chapter 4.

9. WORDS AND NUMBERS: MEMORIES AND MONSTROUS FABLES

1. Telephone conversation on the crisis in East Pakistan between Secretary of State William Rogers and President's Assistant for National Security Affairs Henry Kissinger, 6 April 1971 (FRUS, vol. XI, 45–8).
2. The reference is to the cultivation of hatred and ethnic slaughter between Serbs and Croats in the 1990s (Ignatieff (1994), 14–5).
3. Subuddhi Khan, Minister for Revenue and War, his son Ishan Khan in the same post and Ishan's son Purandar Khan, Finance Minister and Naval Commander of the Sultans of Bengal, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. See Subhas Chandra Bose's unfinished autobiography *An Indian Pilgrim* and appendices in *Netaji Collected Works*, vol. 1, Netaji Research Bureau, Calcutta, 1980. One of Sarat Chandra Bose's close friends and a mentor of India's independence movement was Kumar Debendra Lal Khan of Narajole.
4. The term '*shala*' in Bengali (or '*sala*' in Hindi) literally means 'brother-in-law' (wife's brother).
5. *The Times*, London, 10 January 1972.
6. The perspective and experience of East Pakistani Bengalis who did not support outright secession in 1971 are mostly missing from the literature and discourse on the conflict of that year. This is unsurprising, given that this section of the popula-

tion had to survive in the reality of an independent Bangladesh, in which it would be awkward, if not downright risky, to be perceived as less than enthusiastic about the creation of the new nation-state.

7. For details of this incident see Sarmila Bose, 'The truth about the Jessore massacre', *The Telegraph*, 19 March 2006.
8. Lt Gen. (Capt.) Ali Kuli Khan, who flew helicopters in East Pakistan as part of army aviation, stated to me that Pakistani helicopters were not used to carry or drop bombs. During December Indian twin-engine propeller-driven planes would come every night, noisy but unchallenged as they were out of range of Pakistani anti-aircraft guns, and drop bombs. (Author's interview with Lt Gen. Ali Kuli Khan Khattak, 2005.) Gavin Young reported on Friday 10 December in his 'Dacca Diary' in *The Observer* published on 12 December: 'The propeller-driven Indian aircraft drop huge bombs'. The only instance of bombing from a helicopter that I came across was by the Bangladeshi side: Badrul Alam, who was in the Pakistan Air Force and defected to the Bangladeshi cause, became part of the air arm of the Mukti Bahini. Working only with a couple of old aircraft and a helicopter, they seem to have been allowed to do very little by the Indians. However, Alam stated that during the full-scale war in December they made symbolic offensive sorties: he said that he rigged up the helicopter with bombs and dropped them on Pakistan army targets in Narsingdi (a short distance from Dhaka). Alam was decorated by Bangladesh for his contribution in the liberation war. (Author's conversation with Badrul Alam, 2004.)
9. One Pakistani officer told me he and his men once passed by a village in which there were only old people. No one would speak when asked why. When a child cried the rest of the village was discovered hiding in bushes. They said they had been told that the army killed men, raped women and ate children.
10. Gavin Young, 'Dacca Diary', *The Observer*, 12 December 1971; also published in Government of Bangladesh, Documents, vol. 14, 425–6. Young also describes watching seven to nine Indian planes being shot down. General Chuck Yeager, the man who broke the Sound Barrier, was the US Defence Representative in Islamabad in 1971. He praised the Pakistani pilots in his autobiography: 'They were really good, aggressive dogfighters and proficient in gunnery and air-combat tactics. I was damned impressed'. He also wrote that Pakistan performed better than India in the air: 'The Pakistanis whipped their asses in the sky, but it was the other way around in the ground war. ... the Pakistanis scored a three-to-one kill ratio, knocking out 102 Russian-made Indian jets and losing thirty-four airplanes of their own. I'm certain about the figures because I went out several times a day in a chopper and counted the wrecks below. I counted wrecks on Pakistani soil, documented them by serial number, identified the components...' He also picked up shot-down Indian pilots and took them back for questioning—'They couldn't believe I was in Pakistan or understand what I was doing there'. General Yeager wrote that India bombed his Beech Queen Air, parked at Islamabad airport with US Army markings and a big American flag painted on the tail. 'It was the Indian way of giving Uncle Sam the finger'. (General Chuck Yeager and Leo Janos, *Yeager: An Autobiography*, Bantam Books, 1985, 311–12.) This is interesting as

there is some controversy over the role of the Pakistan Air Force in the war. The many debates relating to war-fighting are outside the scope of this book.

11. *The Times*, 13 December 1971, published in Government of Bangladesh, Documents, vol. 14, 436.
12. *The Observer*, 12 December 1971, published in Government of Bangladesh, Documents, vol. 14, 425.
13. Imam (1986), 263–5.
14. See Chapter 5.
15. See Chapter 5.
16. See Chapter 7.
17. Sengupta in Haider, ed. (1996), 122–3. Translated from Bengali by the author.
18. Pratiti Devi in Kabir, ed. (1999), 101–2. Translated from Bengali by the author.
19. See Chapter 4.
20. Table 2, Sisson and Rose (1990), 32.
21. Sasthi Brata, 'Big brother goes to war', *The Guardian*, 18 September 1971. Future research comparing the accounts of Bangladeshis with the testimony of Indians who took part in such actions, supplemented by Indian archival material, would be extremely interesting if India permits archival access to scholars and Indian armed forces and intelligence personnel who allegedly took part in such actions break their silence.
22. Niazi (2002), 118.
23. Sisson and Rose (1990), 206–14.
24. Sisson and Rose (1990), 214.
25. Qureshi (2003), 276; Mitha (2003), 339. In a White House meeting on 26 March, CIA director Richard Helms says there were 20,000 loyal West Pakistani troops in East Pakistan (FRUS, vol. XI, 25).
26. Niazi (2002), 52.
27. Niazi (2002), 237.
28. See Chapters 4 and 5. An intriguing, but yet unknown number is the number of Pakistani POWs who successfully escaped from Indian custody. It is thought to be a mere handful, but those who managed to escape from their arch-enemy achieved a feat which in the West would have reached the cult status of *The Great Escape*. Maj. Gen. H.A. Qureshi has written about tunnelling attempts similar to those in the Hollywood film (Qureshi (2003)). Capt. Shujaat Latif of 15 Frontier Force recounted to me the fascinating story of his escape from a moving train which was transferring 'trouble-maker' POWs from Agra to Ranchi, with a similar number going the other way (he was recaptured later). According to Pakistani POWs, the Indian guards shot dead an officer-prisoner, Maj. Naseebullah, in retaliation for Capt. Shujaat Latif's escape—a serious charge that merits investigation by the appropriate authorities.
29. *The Times*, 11 January 1972.
30. Chowdhury (1996), quoting Bangladeshi newspapers and government gazette notices of the time. Chowdhury names a 12-member inquiry committee under the chairmanship of one Abdur Rahim, Deputy Inspector General of Police. The committee of inquiry, so it was reported, was asked to submit its report by 30

April 1972. Chowdhury also claims that earlier Sheikh Mujib asked his party workers and members of the constituent assembly to file reports on casualty figures and that compensation schemes were announced for the families of the dead. According to Chowdhury, both the inquiries route and the compensation route indicated the figure of around 50,000 as the total number of people killed by the war of 1971. This would be an overall casualty figure, including victims on all sides, refugees who had died and undetected false claimants. I requested information on the official inquiry committee and its report, but have not been able to obtain independent corroboration of this information.

31. Jahan (1972), 203–4.
32. Power (Basic Books, 2002), 82. The only book related to Bangladesh in Power's bibliography is Lawrence Lifschultz, *Bangladesh: The Unfinished Revolution* (Zed Press, 1979), which is about events in 1975, not 1971. Sisson and Rose's assessment of Lifschultz's book on the coups of 1975 was, '... our own careful reading of the Carnegie files on Bangladesh do not support any of Lifschultz's imaginative conspiracy theories; indeed, in several places he distorts the substance of the comments made by the interviewees by selective quotation or by omitting qualifying phrases'. (Sisson and Rose 1990, 302).
33. Sisson and Rose (1990), 217.
34. *The Guardian*, 6 June 1972.
35. HRC, 513. Justice Hamoodur Rehman, the head of the three-man commission, was a Bengali.
36. HRC, 513.
37. Sisson and Rose (1990), 306.
38. Sisson and Rose (1990), 306.
39. Jacob (2001), 157–8.
40. Niazi (2002), 118.
41. White Paper (1971), 41.
42. Michel Laurent, *The Times*, 30 March 1971. He also wrote that 'perhaps 7000 Pakistanis died in Dacca alone' in two days of fighting.

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Sarmila Bose is a Senior Research Fellow in Politics of South Asia at the University of Oxford, UK. She was a political journalist in India and combines academic and media work. She was educated at Bryn Mawr College and Harvard University, USA.

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